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Thos. H. Woodward
THE QUADROONE;

OR,

ST. MICHAEL'S DAY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LAFITTE," "CAPTAIN KYD," "BURTON," &c.

"For me to love is infamy.
Heaven-born love—that links the virgin heart
To its own noble mate—is not for me,
Maiden of a race accursed and outcast.
Alas! *true love* to me is but *dishonour*;
And, ere it bud, must be outrooted,
E'en if the heart come with it."

WILLIAM CUTLER.

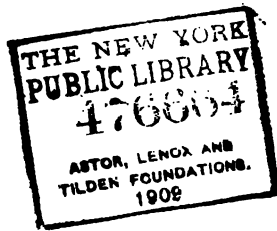
IN TWO VOLUMES.

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THE QUADROONE;

OR,

ST. MICHAEL'S DAY.

CHAPTER I.

SCENE IN THE BANQUET-CHAMBER.

THE ease and affability of the Count of Osma soon thawed the ice of ceremony and suspicion with which the councillors at first received the honour that had been so graciously extended towards them; and even the president, as the banquet proceeded, began to think his suspicions hasty and ill-grounded. All doubts, however, of honourable purpose of the governor were not effectually banished; and occasionally they flashed back upon his mind with redoubled force, as some sinister word or look would betray itself through his guarded language or manner. That the Spaniard was playing a double part, he was well satisfied; and, though his address and bearing invited confidence, he felt that, in yielding it, he was playing with an adder in his bosom.

"So, gentlemen," said the count, setting down a cup of wine, and speaking as if pursuing easy conversation with his guests, "I learn your fair city has been sadly torn by seditions of late, and that the young Marquis of Caronde, an arrant scapegrace, hath laid claim to the government?"

"He did make the attempt, your excellency," answered one of the councillors, on whose face the count's eye chanced to rest as he spoke; "but,

purpose being lawless, and the king's commission having also expired at his father's demise—"

"You saw fit," interrupted the count, laughing sarcastically, "to create seven uncommissioned rulers instead! Methinks this were aggravating the evil. What say you, Signor President?" he asked, with a careless air.

"Now, by my mine honour, I like not that count's manner well," whispered Renault.

"Hush, and give heed," answered Estelle, quickly.

"That, on the death of the royal governor, the power became vested in the people till resumed by his majesty, who might then delegate it to whom he saw fit," answered the president, firmly.

"And so, until this event, the people made choice of a tribunal to manage the state affairs, composed of seven citizens, which body I have now the honour to entertain at my humble table?" he observed, affirmatively rather than interrogatively.

"We did yesterday morning compose such a tribunal, your excellency," he replied, with dignity, "but we are now private citizens."

"So I learn," said the count, dryly. "It has been so told to me, as well as your reason for dissolving your council."

The president evidently did not like the tone in which this was said, but, without giving utterance to his feelings, replied, in an even voice,

"We are no longer in authority, Sir Count, 'tis true."

"The people took it back to give it to Spain. Was it not so?"

"'Tis true they forgot their country for love of their own interests."

"And thus were basely ungrateful to thee, methinks. I will, out of my gratitude to thee, Signor President, repay it to them. Thou wilt gladly see them requited, I doubt not."

"On the contrary, signor, we hold the welfare of our fellow-citizens to heart, and would fain now urge

upon you, who have succeeded us, clemency in changing their laws with the change of government," responded the president, who, with characteristic patriotism, took the first opportunity of securing the welfare of his fellow-citizens.

"And give them to retain their judges also," answered the count, sarcastically. "We had best restore your power, signor, and go back to Spain, even as you sent us back three years ago."

"Ha! he forgets not that day!" said Renault, involuntarily.

"Nay, signor," continued the president, who saw that the memory of the past had flushed the cheek and kindled the eye of the Spaniard, "I ask not this. Conquered countries are allowed to retain their own laws for a few years, that the transition may be gradual and healthy to all parties. This is not a conquered province, thank Heaven! but yet you would change our laws and the language of the courts in one day. It would be greatly for the advantage and tranquillity of the inhabitants, if justice were to be administered for a while longer according to the laws, forms, and usages of the land. It is oppression, your excellency, in the highest degree, to require that a community should at once submit to a total change in the laws that have hitherto governed it, and be compelled to regulate its conduct by rules of which it is totally ignorant. No necessity demands it, and no policy justifies it. The friendship hitherto existing between Louis XV. and the King of Spain should have been a weighty influence with the latter to secure this privilege to the other's subjects. Louis expected it, or he would never have condemned us to such a destiny."

"By the rood, signor, you are bold," answered the count, who had listened with surprise to the plain and fearless language of the president, who even now seemed to be ready to risk his life for the people he had governed, although they had so basely revolted from their allegiance to bow the neck to the Spanish yoke.

"I am bold because humanity is so, your excellency," he answered, steadily, and without quailing beneath the stern eyes that surveyed his face.

"This is the temper of spirit I have had to contend with all along in getting foothold in this province! this is the temper that has twice bathed your city's square with the blood of Spanish men! To you, gentlemen, I owe a debt you shall not long stand creditor for."

"The storm is bursting," said Estelle.

"I am ready," said Renault, laying his hand upon the door.

"Not yet," she said, restraining him; "and remember thy oath!"

"That we have disputed the possession of Spain, I admit; that we would have disputed it, if we had the power, to this moment, I confess," answered the president, with spirit. "You are displeased, sir! But these very efforts to preserve our natal soil from the rule of a foreign prince originated in our attachment to our own; and you ought to behold in our conduct a pledge of our future devotion to Spain, if hereafter we should personally yield to her our allegiance."

"*Santiago me!* I have not been misled in my knowledge of your character. You have taken a superior part yourself, signor, in the revolt since the first claim of Spain, both as a citizen and now as a ruler; and it is mainly through your influence in encouraging the leaders, instead of using your best endeavours to keep the people in the fidelity and subordination they owed to their sovereign, that Spain has so long been kept from her just rights, and the whole province in a state of sedition," he answered, warmly. "It is therefore," he added, rising, and speaking with stern displeasure, and his eyes kindling with vengeance, "and it is therefore that your laws are changed and your tribunals abolished! It is therefore that I would place my foot upon the neck of your people. It is therefore that I have called you hither this evening, that

henceforward rebellious councillors may learn what it is to excite revolt against Spain, and insult Ramirez of Osma! Ho, secure the traitors!" he cried, in a loud and fierce tone to the slaves, who had, hitherto, stood like statues behind the seat of the councillors.

"Now is the time, in Heaven's name! But spare my father!" cried Estelle.

Before Renault could throw open the door, the hand of an Ethiopian slave was upon the throat of each guest, save that of the president, and a gleaming dagger was suspended in the air above their breasts.

"Seize the assassins!" cried Renault, behind the Spaniard's chair, in a voice not less stern than his own.

Before the count could turn his head, he saw that the banquet-room was filled with armed men, who instantly seized and disarmed his slaves, and then fixed upon himself looks of deadly resentment, as if only awaiting their leader's nod to bury the swords they pressed against the naked bosoms of the blacks into their hearts, and then sheathe them in his own. Among them he beheld a noble-looking youth, whose bearing and dress bespoke him to be their captain, in whose indignant countenance, as he stood before him, fixing upon him his clear, flashing eyes, which it seemed he would never take off, he thought he read his own fate. He sat glaring upon him in silence, paralyzed between surprise, fear, and disappointed vengeance.

From the lattice Estelle had witnessed the whole scene! the grateful but astonished councillors looking upon their deliverer as if he had dropped from the skies; the haughty and indignant bearing of Renault; the cringing and terrified slaves; her wonder-stricken and confused father, as he gazed about him, and shrunk beneath the stern glance of the youth! All this she witnessed with mixed feelings of gratitude, joy, and shame; and deep indeed was the crimson that dyed her cheek when she heard her father thus addressed:

"Sir Spaniard," said Renault, sternly, after gazing upon him as if he would convey through his eyes the bitterness of his resentment against the author of the

deed he had been the instrument of averting ; “ Sir Spaniard, under Heaven thou art indebted to other causes than thine own mercy for not shedding the blood of seven innocent men with the dagger of the assassin ! It is not enough that thou hast abolished our sacred tribunals and overturned our laws, but thou must bathe thy hands in the blood of the judges of the land. If guilty of offences against the state, why were they not arraigned before thee and tried by their peers, according to the sacred laws of all Christendom ? Their holy patriotism is guilt in thine eyes. Yet it is not for this thou wouldst do sevenfold murder ! Personal wrongs rankle in thy unforgiving bosom, and thou wouldst make these a sacrifice to thy wounded self-love ! Thou wert driven hence in dire disgrace three years ago, and, now that the power is in thine hands, thou wouldst have avenged thyself upon the whole province by the slaughter of its rulers ! And how wouldst thou have done it ? Under the sacred guise of heaven-born hospitality ; with thy wine-cups in their hands, and thy wine warming their hearts—and thine own too, were it flesh and not stone ! And well hast thou chosen the hour and the place ! the noise of revelry drowning that of murder, and thy carefully-barred doors shutting out human aid, even if the shrieks of thy victims should silence yonder revels ! ”

“ Who art thou, and wherefore dost thou beard me in mine own halls ? ” haughtily demanded the count, who had by this time recovered from his first surprise at the mysterious presence of these deliverers of the councillors at the very moment when their lives were staked ; “ who art thou, that dost use language so daring to a chief in the midst of his own army—to a governor in his own palace ? ”

“ I am the defender of the innocent against a tyrant, ” answered Renault. “ Lay not thy hand upon thy weapon, Sir Knight ! it will little avail thee ; besides, we intend no harm to thy person ; not for love of thee, mark ! but we have made oath to a stranger who led

us hither, that, whatever we do, we will not harm thee. Let these venerable councillors retire, and we will leave thee to the fit society of these trembling slaves, whom thou wouldst have made the instruments of thy private vengeance. They are but tools, and also shall escape—though, by'r lady! you all deserve a common death. See that the slaves retain no weapons, and let them go," he added, to his men.

Dismissed from the grasp of their captors, the cringing slaves crowded together at the extremity of the chamber, as if yet expecting death; while Sulem, who, from the first, had thrown himself upon his face at his master's feet, rose up at Renault's bidding, and presented his colossal proportions to the wondering gaze of his band. In his right hand he held a cimeter; but the hand trembled, and the hideous face of the Ethiopian betrayed mortal fear. True to deal an assassin's secret blow at his master's bidding, the slave was false when open danger menaced, and now betrayed the cowardice of his sanguinary nature.

"Sulem! cleave him to the floor; why is thy cimeter idle?" cried Osma, roused to fury by the cool and resolute bearing of the young chief.

"Martin," said Renault, "take this Goliath's cimeter from him. He seems to have lost loyalty to his master in his adverse fortunes."

Without a word, Sulem surrendered his weapon; and the impression made on Renault's mind by his submissive manner was, that there needed but a word from himself to cause him to plunge it into the breast he should have protected with it.

"Broken, indeed, proves the reed my poor father leaned upon; but he hath taught Sulem treachery, and what but treachery could he have expected from him?" said Estelle, mentally, on seeing this.

Yet it will be seen that Sulem's subtlety and habits of obedience overmastered his fears; and, from his subsequent conduct, it will be questionable if cowardice had as much to do with his actions as cunning.

"Thou seest, Count of Osma, that thy trustiest arm

fails thee now," said Renault. "But thou needest not its aid! We are content to have saved these gentlemen, whom thou wouldst have slain at thine own board, mingling their blood with thy wine. Hath God sent the land a demon to rule over it, that the thought of such a crime as thou hast meditated should enter the heart of man?"

While he was speaking, the count caught the eye of Sulem; met it with a stern reproof, and then glanced significantly to his own hand. Sulem understood him; and, in reply, touched, as if carelessly, with his forefinger, the count's signet, given to him in the hall of audience for another purpose. Then, watching his opportunity, at a single bound he leaped through the door, beside which, at the lattice, was stationed the disguised Estelle; and, before he could be arrested, had flown past her, and was far beyond pursuit at the extremity of the passage.

"Hold! pursue him not," cried Renault to his men. "Your presence is needed here! Gentlemen, I pray you retire while you can do it safely," he added, addressing the councillors; "there may be nothing more in this sudden escape than the cowardice of a traitorous servant. But, lest mischief could come out of it, I beseech you let me see you presently in safety. I lived long in this place, as you all are aware, when my father governed, and chanced to know that there is a concealed door behind yonder arras, which, by a private stairway, conducts you to the outer court of the prisons, and thence into the street. It is not safe for you to pass out through the palace guards as you entered. Follow me, gentlemen."

Thus speaking, Renault crossed the chamber, drew aside the arras, and exposed a low door, which, by touching a spring, he opened. Within was a dark stairway, faintly lighted at the bottom by the moonlight entering from the outer door beneath.

"Gentlemen, this will conduct you to the street; thence your way is plain to your homes. I would despatch half of my men with you as a guard, but their

presence would attract attention, and add nothing to your safety. My venerable father!" he said to the president, who was expressing his gratitude for his aid in saving his life, "you owe it not to me, but to a gallant stranger, who has not appeared on the scene to receive the thanks that are his due. Farewell! Mount your horses, each of you, gentlemen, and leave the city within the hour for the fortress, where there are brave men to receive you! The countersign of the east gate, and which I learned from this brave stranger, is '*Osma's justice*,' which liked to have been illustrated but for our timely presence."

"Ha! knowest thou it?" exclaimed Osma, with surprise.

"Mount and ride; this poor town is no longer a place for true men. Say to Charleval," then added Renault, in a lower tone, "I will be with him at evening to-morrow, when I shall not return to the city till we ride into it as conquerors and avengers. Go, with Heaven's blessing, gentlemen!" he added, embracing each as they passed through the door and descended the staircase.

"Now, Signor Count Osma," said Renault, after they had departed, "inasmuch as I have stepped between thee and thy bloody vengeance, and the victims of thy vindictiveness are beyond thy reach, I will leave thee to the residue of thy feast; and, by'r lady! in absence of the gentlemen thou didst make this supper for, intending it should be their last, thou shalt fain have guests better fitting thee. So, slaves, seat yourselves at the board! it is beeseeming that slaves should be a tyrant's guests, and it becomes a tyrant to feast only with such. Down with ye, slaves!" cried Renault, between irony and stern indignation.

The trembling slaves obeyed, and the table was once more surrounded with guests. But what guests indeed! Osma heard the command with surprise, and saw it obeyed with a terrific ferocity of aspect. Thrice he looked from the table to the young chief, and thrice from the young chief to the table, alternately, as if

questioning his senses. His haughty spirit blazed at the insult. The deadliest vengeance flashed from his eyes. His lips grew livid, and his brow became black as night. Renault watched these tokens of a tempest within him with a smile upon his lip, which was only wanting to inspire the count with fury. Like an enraged tiger, disdaining his sword, he sprung upon Renault, and fixed his hands upon his throat and breast with the grasp of demoniac vengeance. Quicker than lightning, the young quadroon grappled with him in the same manner, and, face to face—the one with eyes literally blazing with rage, the other with a cool and steady gaze—they confronted each other with deadly purpose. Several of the *courreurs du bois* sprung forward to Renault's relief, but he restrained them with a look.

"Unhand me, Sir Count!" at length cried Renault, who grew flushed in the face with the pressure upon his throat, "or I shall do thee mortal injury."

"Never!" said the count, with a malignant smile of desperate revenge.

"I have sworn not to harm thee," he continued, speaking with difficulty.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the Spaniard, with hellish sounds, as he pressed still harder upon his windpipe, and, with his other hand upon his breast, seemed to clinch into the flesh, as if seeking to tear through to his heart.

"Thy blood be upon thine own head, then!" gasped Renault.

"Spare—oh spare my father!" shrieked a female voice behind them at this menace.

But, ere he heard, Renault had released his hold upon the count's throat, drawn a dagger from his belt, and, holding it above his breast, threatened him with instant death. At the same time with the shriek, his uplifted hand was arrested by a woman's bright arm passing before his eyes. The hold it fastened upon his wrist was slight, and he could easily have thrown it off; but there is an indescribable power in a woman's voice or intervening arm that instantly stays the fiercest spirit

and suspends the strongest hand. Renault felt it. His hand remained immovable where it had been arrested by the light grasp laid upon it! With the most wondering astonishment, he beheld before him a beautiful girl, habited in the very cloak his guide had worn—the hat itself cast at her feet—her superb head without a covering—and her bright, auburn hair bound with a coronet of pearls and precious stones. Her large blue eyes were turned upon him imploringly, while with the other hand she released the relaxing gripe of the surprised count from his throat. He gazed upon her with wonder and adoring admiration. The cloak—the flapping *sombrero*—the youthful cheek he had seen beneath it—could it be? it was none other, he was convinced, than his late guide! The count was her father, then! Hence this singular regard for him, mingled with desire to save the councillors. He saw that the noble daughter had risked all to become the saviour of a father's honour, and save the lives of innocent men! He read the whole at a glance. He now remembered the soft hand he had pressed, and the tremulous voice that at times fell on his ear. He remembered the language he had interchanged with her upon love and womanly devotion. His guide was, then, a beautiful woman! As he gazed upon her, the dagger dropped from his hand, and, with eyes full of adoration, he cast himself on one knee before her, and said, with a depth of feeling that surprised himself,

“Gentle maiden, forgive me the act! it was a menace only to save my own life. But, had I known thou wert his daughter, I would have let him slay me before I could have lifted my hand against him. Pardon me, I pray thee!”

“I have nothing to pardon, brave youth; thy life was endangered, and it was done in thy defence. But thou didst wantonly draw my father's ire upon thee by seating his slaves at his board!” she said, with something like displeasure.

“I confess my fault,” he said, with a mantling brow; “but—”

"Nay, thou hast no need to excuse thyself! Thou hast acted with more moderation than I hoped for. Bid those slaves leave the board, and receive my thanks for thy courage and confidence."

She slightly blushed as she spoke ; and, turning from the handsome eyes of Renault, which were fixed admiringly upon her beauty, she cast herself affectionately upon the breast of her parent, who sternly continued to survey her and the disguise she partly retained in silence, and by his looks seemed to understand its object.

"Away, traitress!" he cried, casting her from him.

"My dear father—"

"Thou hast betrayed me—begone!"

"Nay," she cried, clinging to him, "I have loved thee too well to betray thee! I knew thou didst contemplate a deed that would tarnish thy name, and wound thy knightly honour—"

"And so, to conceal the guilt, hast led hither an armed band to blazon it to the world. Out! thou art a poor pleader!"

"Nay, it was to save the world from being startled at a deed for which men have no name," she said, with great boldness. "Thou couldst ne'er have concealed the crime! if indeed from earth, never from Heaven!"

"Silence! thou hast done worthy of death thyself!" he said, fiercely.

"I am ready to atone, then, with my life. Heaven is my witness, I sought only thy honour, my father!"

"Cast off this cloak, and retire to thy chamber."

"Wilt thou not embrace me?"

"Away! I cannot abide thee!" he said, waving his hand commandingly.

Dropping from her graceful shoulders the *roque-laine*, displaying by the act a form of the divinest symmetry, with a pale and drooping cheek she slowly retired from the banquet-chamber. Renault's eyes followed her until she disappeared, and he then felt that she had carried away his heart.

"But what have I, an accursed quadroon—I, to do with a maiden's love like her? Like the worshippers of the sun, I may adore her afar off till blinded by my devotion, and my heart is burned up by her unapproachable brightness. Alas! for what do I live? wherefore do I court life? From this hour death is most welcome! Why did Heaven give me a heart to love, and then link me with a race to whom love is forbidden? Beautiful maiden! I will not insult thee by thinking of thee; yet not to think of thee were not to exist." Thus thought Renault as he turned from the door through which she had retired from his ardent gaze.

"So, young sir, thou art indebted to yonder foolish girl for thy presence here to-night? By the rood! thou didst happen in at a happy time; and not to make thee welcome were discourtesy to my hospitality," said the count, in a sarcastic tone.

Renault cast aside his gloomy reflections, and looked into the speaker's face with surprise at the words he spoke; but a glance at his ironical lip, and hard, quiet eye, told him how dangerous was the man with whom he had to do.

"We thank thee, Count of Osma, for thy words," he replied, assuming the same subtle tone; "but, having witnessed the display of thy hospitality once this evening, will be so uncourteous as to decline troubling thee for farther exhibitions of it."

At this moment the bolts and bars were suddenly removed by some persons outside the door leading into the hall. Osma's eyes lighted up with pleasure as he replied,

"Thou shalt not depart till thou hast tasted it, nevertheless."

The doors were thrown wide as he spoke, and Sulem the Moor, with a score of men-at-arms, rushed into the chamber.

"Sulem, thou hast redeemed thy cowardice," said the count to him; and then shouted aloud, "Seize and disarm these traitorous rebels, who would beard their

governor in his very banquet-chamber! If the dogs resist, cut them down!"

Renault was not taken unawares; the noise of the moving bolts and the elated voice of the Spaniard prepared him for a hostile surprise. He gave a single command, and his brave *courreurs du bois* formed themselves, with drawn swords and pistols levelled, on the opposite side of the table; and, when the door was thrown open, they were ready to meet and resist the expected assailants. While the last word of command was yet on the count's lip, Renault wound a startling peal on his bugle, and, in answer, had the satisfaction to behold through the door green plumes waving beyond and above the helmets of the men-at-arms, and near the door to hear another bugle reply.

"Stay, Count of Osma," he said, with a smile, "and, ere you seek to enforce your command, tell me the meaning of yonder cluster of green plumes!"

Osma looked into the hall, and saw with dismay that his men-at-arms were closed upon from the rear by a band in the same uniform with those within the banquet-chamber.

"Hold, men-at-arms!" he cried, on seeing this superior force; "treachery and rebellion hath the better of it this night. Let these retire, if they will, unmolested."

"Thou hast done well, Sir Spaniard," said Renault, haughtily, "and hast avoided a second scene such as I believe thou wert a party to three years ago!" The count replied with a look of deadly hostility, and, as Renault led his band from the chamber, he scornfully asked,

"Pray what do men name thee, good youth, that I may know to whom I am indebted for this visit to my banquet-room?"

"My name is Renault the Quadroon."

"Ha!" he exclaimed, with unfeigned surprise, and then added, with a peculiar smile, that had, he knew not why, a most extraordinary effect upon Renault, "I have lately heard of thee. Go, and I will remember thee and *thine*!"

Renault had, with his men, passed through Osma's minions, and joined the rest of the band without, before the last words of the Spaniard, which rung forebodingly, flashed in their full meaning upon his ear.

"On thee and *thine*!" he repeated, with alarm. "Azèlie! Hath he seen her? Martin," he cried to his lieutenant, "when we gain the Place d'Armes, ride with the band to the rendezvous, and remain till I join you. Something evil will come of this night's work, I fear me!"

In a compact body the band of *courreurs du bois* marched down through the hall, which had been nearly deserted by the alarmed citizens on the approach of the men-at-arms, and, gaining the square, mounted their horses and galloped to their rendezvous; while Renault, on the wings of apprehension and mistrust, rode to his own abode, which he had not entered since his departure a little after midnight of the night before.

CHAPTER II.

SCENE BETWEEN THE COUNT AND THE ASSASSIN.

THE Count of Osma, without a word of explanation, remanded his guards to their station in the *Plaza* before the palace, and was left only with Sulem and the slaves. Sending the latter away, he paced the chamber which had been the scene of such varied events, as if to get time to calm his thoughts. At length the agitated and violent character of his face settled down into a still expression. Not a trace of anger, or vindictiveness, or disappointment remained. All was calm save the eye, which shone with a triumphant light. He had formed a plan to avenge himself upon Renault, against whom he concentrated all his displeasure towards his daughter, and his vengeance at being thwarted in the assassination of the judges.

"Follow me, Sulem," he said, leaving the chamber.

Traversing half the length of the paved passage along which Estelle had guided Renault and his band, he opened a door at the left, and entered a small but elegant cabinet, with which communicated a sleeping and ante room.

"Didst thou not tell me, slave, that this lovely quadroone, Azélie, had a brother Renault, a youth in great favour with the town's-people, and of late leader of a party hostile to Spain?"

"Even so, *cadi*."

"Of whom learned you this?"

"Of the same porter at the gate of their dwelling," answered the Moor; for, obedient to his master's orders given at the door of the Cathedral, he had, at an indifferent, careless pace, followed Azélie to her threshold, where, seeing the old porter take a look out into the street before closing the gate after them, he skilfully detained him, and, by shrewdly-put questions, learned everything he desired to know of the quadroone family. He then returned and reported it to the count, who, involved in the busy affairs of the day, scarce questioned him at the time beyond his relation, though by no means indifferent to his communication. He was now free from his engagements, and, as his sudden passion for the fair quadroone was stronger than his resentment against the brother, he banished from his breast all else, and gave his mind up only to its gratification. He reflected a few moments after Sulem had answered, and then observed abruptly,

"Said you not one spoke with you in the hall who desired to see me on matters of moment?"

"He bade me say he could serve your excellency better than a score of men-at-arms if you would give him audience."

"Did you bid him wait?"

"Nay, I was hastening with the guard to your relief—"

"Well, well, enough. Go, now, and see thou return not without him. Stay! Heard you aught to-day of

the whereabouts of this eccentric young—of Don Henrique I mean? He seems to delight in mystery.”

“Nothing beyond the words of the dark woman.”

“Go!”

Left alone, Garcia of Osma threw himself into a seat, and began to think over the events of the evening. He had been thwarted in his deliberate and coolly-planned attempt to assassinate the provincial rulers. Did he hope to do so black a deed in secret, and to escape after without suspicion, and walk among men unmarked by the finger of detestation? No. He was willing—the deed done—to publish it! and, trusting to the protection of the army he commanded, defy the province. To his own king and the Spanish cortes he was the representative of his own person, and the only source through which his personal acts could be officially recognised. He was now foiled indeed; but, inwardly determining that his vengeance should yet have its victims, he banished for the present these reflections, and passed the time until Sulem's return in the contemplation of the enchanting quadroone, resolving to combine his revenge towards Renault with his passion for her.

Sulem had heard from the porter of Renault's pride; and the count's knowledge of character plainly told him that the high-spirited youth would scarce resign his sister to an open enemy, though of so high a rank as himself; and that, in pursuing his passion, he was best bringing about his vengeance. But Ramarez of Osma was not a man to let a deep affront be atoned for alone by moral punishment however degrading. Not only dishonour and contempt did he hope to heap upon Renault through his sister, but he was sure never to rest until he had also added his blood.

While he was meditating on this theme the Moor reappeared, and ushered in a short, swarthy man, with restless, snaky eyes, that seemed ever watchful with suspicion. His dress was a blue frock, thickly adorned with bell-shaped silver buttons, the breast and cuffs of it covered with needlework. His low-crown-

ed hat was worn with a cutthroat air above his eyes, and his smallclothes and hose were of one piece, and fitted tightly to a pair of spindle-legs, that had a gliding rather than walking motion. He wore scarlet morocco slippers, a scarlet sash about his waist, and a scarlet bandanna kerchief loosely wound about his neck. He looked a thorough-paced villain; and his thin, wiry fingers had a constant and nervous clutch against the palm, that reminded the observer of stilettos and midnight murders. Osma measured him at a glance, and seemed, by a sort of freemasonry and affinity of brotherhood, to read him at once. Without hesitation, he said instantly to him,

"You are the man I want."

"I thought so," said the other, with a cold laugh.

"You thought so, villain!" repeated Osma, sternly.

"I heard you had some matter to settle with the quadroon Renault."

"Who told thee?"

"My own wits, with the aid of my eyes and ears."

"What is thy name?"

"Rascas."

"Rascal, rather, if I might read it in thy face."

"We should be cousins, then, for I read it in thine to-day."

"Ha! this is too bold, sir!" cried the count, half drawing his sword.

"I am here to serve a bold man."

"Go to—thou hast as much brass as villainy in thee. In what wouldst thou serve me?" he demanded, eyeing him sharply.

"With my dagger."

"Thou hast as little grace of speech as of visage, sirrah."

"And am, therefore, fitter for deeds."

"Wherefore hast thou sought me?"

"To aid thee in thy vengeance and thy passions."

"Dost thou know this?"

"I was in the Cathedral to-day," he answered, dryly.

"And now do I remember I met thee in the street, signor," said Sulem.

"When thou wert coming from gossiping with Renault's garrulous porter," he answered, significantly.

"By the rood, Monsieur Rascas, thou art invaluable if thy discretion measure thy subtlety."

"Gold will buy secrecy."

"Be it so. Sulem, place in his hands an onza of gold. Thou shalt have this, sirrah, so long as thou servest me faithfully. But, if thou prove false to me, I shall not be backward in changing it for steel."

"Thou art never backward in its use, if men lie not."

"Thy tongue is flippant, sirrah."

"I did but allude to thy soldierly skill, signor," answered Rascas, with an ironical leer.

"Thou knowest more than thou wouldst seem to know of me."

"We have met in Spain, signor."

"Ha! When?"

"On the night the southern tower of the castle of Osma fell into the sea."

The count started with an exclamation, and for a moment eyed him fixedly.

"Wilt trust me, signor?" asked Rascas, with a confident smile.

"Yes, yes. So thou speak to me no more of this. Thou hast been a wanderer since—"

"That night's work, dost thou mean?"

"Speak of it again, and thou diest."

"Why, blood-letting afterward I took to so kindly, that Spain became too warm for me, and I have since been a traveller on other men's purses. But this province hath no wealthy hidalgos; and I was wellnigh impoverished and tempted to take to the highway, when your excellency came and filled me with hopes; for, by mine honour, though I have done a kindly deed for many a cavalier since, I have never served so free a hand as thyself."

"Thou art a rare villain, sirrah; and I marvel thou art unhung."

"The devil hath sworn I shall not hang till a great—"

er rogue than I be found to hang with me," said the professional assassin, with a forward and bold bearing, that caused the Count of Osma to bite his lip with shame and vexation ; for joint crime is a leveller of all distinctions of rank, and he keenly felt it to be so.

"Rascas, thou hast done well in coming hither ; I have need of thee, though not of thy dagger, this very hour," he said, in a grave tone, that gave him to understand it was time for him to restrain his freedom of tongue, and devote himself to the will of his new master. "Your knowledge of this city and people will be of infinite use to me."

"Speak, signor !" he said, with attention.

In a few words the count detailed the scenes that had transpired in the banquet-chamber, much of which the wily villain had learned through listening, and that spirit of ever-active suspicion which caused him to know, as if by intuition, everything that passed around him, if by any means he might work mischief out of it for his own ends.

"Now, sirrah, I would have you bear this note," he said, writing it as he spoke, "to the colonel of my cuirassiers in the barracks. It is a command for him to mount and follow you with sixty horse. These station at the eastern gate, and, if not too late, take these councillors prisoners as they ride forth. Here is a new countersign for the night, Sulern," he continued to his slave, "which bear to the captain of the palace guards, and command him instantly to have it delivered to all the posts ; then go thyself, and, on thy life, see that every barrier be closed for the night save the eastern gate. Fly, and, having done my bidding, hasten back hither."

"It shall be done."

"Now, Rascas, I depend on your sagacity and cunning, as much as on the courage of my cuirassiers, to seize these rebellious judges. It is not half an hour since they left, and it will take time for them to prepare and get to saddle. If they have passed the gate, pursue them."

"What shall be done with them, signor, if taken?"

"Cast them into the keep of the prison, and then bring me word. See that it is done without parade or show of tumult. Away with thee."

The assassin glided from the apartment, and when his light, swift tread ceased to reach his ear, the Count of Osma threw over his rich banquet dress a sable velvet cloak, and covered his brow with a black Spanish bonnet without a plume; then exchanging his dress sword for a short hanger, and concealing his face to the eyes with the folds of the mantle, he left the cabinet, and, entering the marble passage, paused an instant, as if undetermined which way to go. At length he exclaimed,

"A guerdon of thanks to this Renault. Yonder private door, which he opened for the escape of the councillors from the banquet-room, will aid my secret departure from the palace."

He was about to turn in this direction, when the light from Estelle's door arrested his eye. He changed his purpose instantly on seeing this, and walked rapidly and noiselessly towards her apartment. The door was ajar, and open wide enough to admit him. He softly entered the antechamber, where two of her slaves were sleeping on mats laid before the inner door of her toilet closet. This door was open, and all was still within. He entered, and beheld his daughter kneeling beside an ottoman, on which her head rested, her face laid on her snowy arm, sleeping like a child. A tear was on one cheek, and a liquid drop glittered with trembling lustre upon her long eyelash. He gazed upon this sweet picture a few moments, and his face grew sad and tender.

"Poor child, thou hast wept thyself to sleep!" he said, half audibly. "She hath but acted like a loving daughter, to save a guilty father from what she esteemed a crime—not understanding I have power of life and death! Sweet child! Thou lovest me, Lil, and thou art, of human kind, all my stern heart yearns to! I have too often wounded thy generous

spirit. I will forgive thee when thou wakest, for thou art unhappy."

He stooped and kissed her, and the touch of his lip instantly awoke her. She opened her eyes, and, seeing who it was, and the kind look with which he was bending over her, threw her arms around him, and, joyfully repeating "my dear father," burst into tears.

"Nay, Lil, thou hast my forgiveness," he said, affectionately.

"Thou art ever kind to me, dearest father ! Oh that thou wert not thine own enemy !"

"Thine error is, child, that thou judgest my acts as a conqueror and governor of a rebellious province, as thou wouldst do those of a private person. Does the king commit a crime when he condemns a traitor to the scaffold ? Is a judge a murderer who sentences the murderer to death ? These men have done deeds worthy of death. They have strengthened the resistance of the colonists ; have been the fomenters of sedition in the town ; and have not only refused to surrender their authority and the seals of the province, but have traitorously dissolved their body, and, by the act, placed themselves in the attitude of rebels. 'Fore Heaven ! they are well worthy of death."

"There is the tribunal of the Cabildo, my father, where they should have been arraigned."

"The judgment of the Cabildo is but the echo of my own, girl. I adjudged them worthy of death in the tribunal of my own mind, the Cabildo would have done the same."

"Nevertheless, thou wouldst have escaped the odium of the act, and not taken into thine own hands the duty of the public executioner !" she answered, with animation.

"Thou hast well spoken, child," he said, with a changed manner, after a moment's thought ; "they have now escaped. If taken, they shall be arraigned before the tribunal of the Cabildo, as you desire. I ought to thank thee that I did not make my banquet-

room a slaughter-house for the rebels," he continued, smiling and tapping her cheek ; "but I would have made an example of them to the people, and every hour's delay was dangerous, inasmuch as rumours reached me that they were already conspiring against my power. The *escapade* of three hundred horsemen through the eastern gate before dawn reported by the captain of the guard, I have reason to think they had something to do with. Now, my daughter, I have forgiven thee this once for thy filial love ; but let not any future interference in my affairs call from me harsh chidings where alone I would speak the language of affection. Seek thy couch ! To-morrow I will have an entertainment for thee to receive the fair signoras of the town, who, doubtless, desirous of following the example of their lords, would gladly throng hither to pay homage to thy rank and beauty."

"Nay, father, I need it not."

"It becomes our station, daughter, to endure the ceremony ; besides," he added, with a smile, "I would see, with a father's jealousy, if Louisiana has loveliness to match thine. Seek thy couch early, that the rose in the morning may take the place of the lily now on thy cheek. Good-night, *mia alma*," he added, kissing her.

Then, casting his mantle about his noble form, this subtle, designing, intriguing man—the more dangerous for the virtues that mingled with his vices—left the chamber, and traversed the paved passage to the private banquet-room. He was about to enter, when a voice within arrested his steps. Advancing cautiously forward, he saw through the partly-open door a singular-looking being sitting in his own state-chair, at the head of the gold and silver piled board, with a goblet of wine in one hand and a pineapple in the other, alternately sipping of the wine and eating of the fruit, keeping up a running soliloquy between. His dress consisted of a yellow doublet, spotted with black fleur-de-lis ; scarlet breeches, and a high, conical cap of flaming red. His shape was ludicrously deformed, a hump-back

here, and a bandy-leg there ; while the count wondered at his physiognomy, having never before beheld so extraordinary a one. He, moreover, seemed drunk.

"Now I would steal this gold cup an' I knew it to be gold," he soliloquized, surveying the goblet wishfully ; "but gold hath a look o' brass ; and, were I to steal a brass goblet for a gold one, I'd hang myself for an ass. Here be a silver tankard ; that has a good complexion and genuine. I'll put that in my pocket," he said, surting the action to the word. "There is a gold salt-spoon ; verily it doth look like brass ; but, an' it were not gold, methinks cousin Spain would not have it. I will take it at a venture ; and, as the salt-cellar is of no value without the spoon, like a mortar without pestle, I must needs let it keep company with the spoon. I would gossip Boviedo were here. He could tell me an' these platters be silver. An' I thought so, I would have the largest, and cut it up into twelve-penny bits. This bottle is out, but here is one that hath a cup gone out o' it ; I will e'en fill from it. 'Tis strange I am not drunk ! Had I brains like other men for the wine to get into, I had been dead drunk two good hours ago ! Cousin Spain hath made a bountiful—a bounteous supper," he said, surveying the gorgeous board ; "it were a lucky hour I found my way in here, and especially discovered this snug supper, after my false subjects had left me for drunk in the other room. 'Tis true (this wine hath flavour !) I did roll off the table ; but wine that doth not put a true man on his back hath water in it—(Ah ! this is rare wine ; here's to cousin Osma's health !)—but I got to my feet again when I had laid long enough to do credit to the vintage. (This is grown in Madeira, or Gobin is a fool.) I would cousin Spain were here to hob and nob ; 'tis dull work drinking alone ; it will take till daylight to put all these seventeen bottles o' wine 'eneath my belt. (I shall never love any other wine save cousin Osma's after this.) I can get drunk nine times at a sitting on't, and go home sober. Out on the vile trash gossip Boviedo and I were sopping

our insides with last night ! If a man get drunk on it, he lieth twenty-four hours like a hog, and waketh up with his head split in two. Here's to cousin Osma, and may he never want good wine, or Gobin to drink it for him !" he added, emptying his goblet for the third time since he was first discovered by the count.

"Here's to cousin Gobin, who shall never drink bad wine while Osma can give him good," responded the count, amused at Gobin's soliloquy, and instantly appreciating and chiming in with the humour of his character. He had entered the chamber before he spoke, and, advancing unseen to the table, had a goblet already in his hand, when Gobin looked up and beheld him.

"Art thou cousin Osma?" he asked, with ready self-possession.

"None other, gossip Gobin. Dost thou love wine?"

"Doth an unweaned child love its mother's milk?" he answered, without being moved by the sudden appearance of the governor.

"How many goblets hast thou emptied, gossip?" asked the count, smiling.

"When I get this and another down that I shall soon pour out, cousin, I shall have seen the bottom o' it eleven times since I adjourned to this room."

"Hast thou been feasting in the hall, too?"

"Wouldst thou have a man stuff his gullet with meat when wine abounds? I have been *bibing*, cousin, not feasting—no, by my mother's beard!"

"And how many cups didst thou put down there?"

"Nineteen, cousin, and should ha' rounded the score had I not tumbled off the table."

"How comest thou here, then, in such sober guise?"

"The goodness o' the wine, cousin Osma, I got drunk upon. I slept twenty minutes like an infant, and got up as fresh as if wine had not crossed my lip for a twelvemonth. Finding my compatriots fled, and seeing a door partly open, I ventured in, and soon made myself at home here."

"So I perceive, worthy Gobin, and am glad thou lovest my wine. Art thou in service in the town?"

"I am a gentleman of leisure, and live by mother wit," he answered, gravely.

"Wilt thou take service with me at wages ? Thou shalt serve at court."

"Nay, folly is at a discount in courts. Nothing hath merit nowadays but wine," he answered, emptying his cup.

"Thou shalt drink such wine as that at thy dinner each day," said the count, taken with a sudden humour to attach him to his household.

"I have a conscience at swearing allegiance, cousin."

"Thou shalt not owe allegiance save to mirth and folly. Our palace is somewhat grave, and we would make thee master of mirth. Wilt thou serve me ?"

"Verily will I do't, till I find a master who keepeth better wine than thou dost. Let us take a goblet upon it, gossip."

The count drank to him by the title of Bacchus the Second, and then was about to deliver him, with the deserted banquet-halls, to the care of his master of the ceremonies, who chanced to approach at that moment, when Gobin drew from his vest a small folded and sealed paper, saying, with a drunken hiccough,

"Speakin' o' Bacchus, gossip Spain, reminds me that a womankind made me a Mercury, and bade me place this in thy hands ere I touched goblet to lip. Thou seest I have most faithfully done her bidding !"

"A most trusty messenger," said the count, taking the note from him.

With an eager and surprised eye, he read the superscription to "The most noble Count Ramarez of Osma," in a strong but evidently female hand. He tore it open.

"Ninine, the mother of the Quadroone Azèlie, has witnessed the noble Count Osma's admiration of her daughter. If agreeable to his excellency to grant her an audience in his own cabinet, the intimation of his wishes will be a command to

"NININE,"

The count read this extraordinary, but in that clime, in that day, no unusual document, with a degree of gratification he could not conceal.

"This is far beyond my hopes! Fortune hath favoured me strangely," he said, half aloud. "How well hath that handsome, intriguing mother read my deep passion! This is my first lesson in the romance of this Western Ind. I will go to this interview, and, thanks to my cousin Gobin, I shall not have to trust to stratagem, as I was about to do, to gain admittance beneath the same roof with this divine Azélie. Now are love and revenge both in my grasp."

He threw aside, as he spoke, the arras that concealed the door through which the councillors had escaped, and, followed by his Cuban bloodhound, descended the stairway to the street. Here he carefully and effectually enveloped his features and person in the folds of his mantle from the scrutiny of passers-by; for at that early hour, nine o'clock having just struck, the Place d'Armes and streets adjacent were filled with revellers retiring from the banquet, and citizens, male and female, drawn forth either by curiosity or the calm beauty of the night. Then, taking his way for a short distance along the shaded wall of the prison, he turned into a side street and disappeared.

CHAPTER III.

TWILIGHT SCENE BETWEEN LOVERS.

AFTER the departure of Renault from the couch of his sleeping guest, Don Henrique (for back to this period does the story now return), the senses of the wounded cavalier, it has been seen, were lulled to sleep by the soft and distant music of the mandoline and co-mingling voice of Azélie. When he awoke,

the golden sunlight of a tropical afternoon shone aslant into the court, and the atmosphere was of a still, dreamy character, that seemed to invite to indolent repose all living things. It was the voluptuous hour of the *siesta*, when the dwellers in southern climes resign themselves to the drowsy influence of the time, and households and cities are buried in the deep repose of midnight, until the evening breezes, that stir the lethargic air, awaken them with renewed life and energies. But Don Henrique required no sleep. Twelve hours of undisturbed rest had invigorated him. He felt free from pain, and all trace of suffering and illness had disappeared. His spirits were fresh and elastic as his body; and, save from the remembrance that he had recently lost blood, he would not have known that the usual condition of his bodily health had been interrupted.

"How perfectly well I am!" he said, on opening his eyes. "If it were not that I am here," added he, looking around him, "I should believe I had been dreaming of conflicts and wounds, of illness, and of a lovely maiden watching my pillow. How my heart bounds at the recollection of her scarcely earthly beauty! I am now well, thanks to her tender care, and that of her brave and gallant brother, and have no farther excuse for intruding on their hospitality. I must depart, yet would, methinks, lie wounded here for ever, for her gentle company; I will see her ere I go, and thank her for her charity, drinking in the while Love's poison from the well of her dark eyes. Ha! I have slept well! There sounds five o'clock, with a thick, muffled tone, as if it would not wake the slumbering town. How still is all, save the falling of the water in the fountain, and the hum of flies that seek the shade to sport in! It is quiet as midnight! Even the birds, that last night made the orange groves without eloquent with song, are now hushed! I will take this time to loiter about the court and pleasant cloisters of the mansion; for these Orleannois have a delightful idea of domestic luxury, and a most perfect taste in the uni-

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son of the useful and ornamental : surely this very room hath no equal in Spain ! Yonder carved and gilded corridors, with their Venetian blinds and latticed sides, invite to walk ; while the music of falling water, and, by moonlight, the singing of birds, and the pleasant groves of orange-trees, are present to delight the ear and eye. I will go and loiter there until my lovely hostess or her brother awake ; for methinks I myself am the only one not sleeping in the town !”

He arose when he had thus soliloquized, and, as he did so, a slave, whom he had not hitherto seen, advanced from a recess with a bowl and ewer of iced-water in his hand, and, silently kneeling before him, held them for his service ; another followed, bearing a snowy napkin, and holding a silver tray, covered with vessels and instruments for the toilet of the most elegant and costly description. His surprise at their sudden appearance did not prevent him from making the intended use of their services ; and having performed his ablutions and made his toilet, he resumed his weapons. Then, placing his Spanish bonnet beneath his arm, he was about to demand of them whether their master had returned, when, to his surprise, he found he was alone.

“ These slaves appear and disappear like magic,” he said, vexed at their departure before he could learn anything of either of his youthful hosts ; “ but, by'r lady ! they are bearers of sweet odours, and are skilful at a cavalier's toilet. Jove ne'er had his beard perfumed with such rich scent as the rogues have laid upon my mustache withal ! If they had ended their handiwork by leaving me a cup of coffee or a— Here am I served with a wish on my lip !” he cried, as two more slaves, bearing salvers with coffee and delicate refreshments, at this instant appeared. “ This is hospitality indeed, where one no sooner wishes than his desire is gratified ! These ebony gentlemen shall not escape, like their fellows, unquestioned,” he added, as he seated himself to the sumptuous repast they spread before him.

"Now, garçons," he asked, when he had completed his grateful meal, to which his long fast enabled him to do justice, turning to the slaves behind him, "prithée tell me by whose orders I am thus princely entertained?"

The slaves crossed their hands upon their breasts, shook their heads, and then touched their lips with a fore finger.

"Are the rogues dumb, or know they not my speech?" he asked of himself. "Where is your master? Say his guest would speak with him!"

They again made a gesture rather of ignorance of his words than of mysterious silence, as he was disposed to attribute it to at first, and then, making an obeisance, silently removed the salvers from before him and disappeared from the room.

"I clearly see I cannot increase greatly in knowledge from these speechless slaves of my hospitable entertainer, and must fain be patient till he choose to make his appearance in person. I feel in better health and spirits than I have done since I left Spain. There is magic in a maiden's nursing, or strange health is in this southern air! I will forth into the court, where I see the wind is slightly moving yonder acacia top, and inspire it. Perchance fortune may favour me also with a sight of the fair girl, whose image Sleep, with noiseless burin, has engraven indelibly on my heart. I certainly am fascinated with her beauty, and most truly has she impressed me with feelings to which my heart has been hitherto a stranger. This may be, and may not be love. Time will determine. Then her condition! Ha! I had wellnigh forgotten it. A slave—at least the *child* of a slave! the offspring of guilt—and, and—it will out—with Ethiopian blood in her veins! This, then, is she who has touched thy heart, Henrique! Can such a one be loved by thee? No, not if she were guilty of her mother's bondage and of her slavish descent—No! But is she guilty of these? Is she not as fair and glorious in virgin beauty as if descendant from a long line of European kings? Do

I love her, then, or hate her for the acts of the generation before her, or for the blood of her ancestors, so long as she bears none of either in her own person, but appears a creation of all beauty, grace, and purity? Besides, if I do love her, as I begin to suspect I do, I love her for *herself*! Had she risen, all lovely as she is, from a fountain, or bounded from an opening rose-bud upon the ground (mortal save in birth), would she not have been worthy to be loved and even adored? What is it to me if she is now in all else this very thing, whether she be derived from kings or slaves, or sprung from a rose or a fountain, without father or mother? But this is weak sophistry for the test of the world, and, I must confess, my heart hath more to do in framing it than my head. Nay, I must see her again, and either break or more firmly bind the chain her singular beauty has flung around me."

Don Henrique then idly lounged from the apartment which had been the scene of events so interesting to his heart, sensibly touched by the beauty and condition of the lovely quadroone, and entered upon a spacious corridor, that was continued along the four sides of the quadrangle, and protected from the sun by lattice-work constructed between the snow-white columns that supported it.

This lattice was thickly covered with flowing vines, which, tastefully entwining around the columns to their capitals, fell gracefully down to the ground again, or, artfully fashioned into festoons, swung from pillar to pillar. At intervals were open arches communicating with the court, which was ornamented on every side with dark-polished leaved shrubs, growing in gigantic urns, and bearing magnificent flowers on stately stalks; while lesser plants, in porcelain or marble vases, formed everywhere tasteful walks and figures, and orange, althea, lemon, acacia, and other trees, planted in groups, cast a cool and almost impervious shade beneath. In the midst stood a fountain of white marble, the spray shooting upward from a lion's mouth, and descending upon a statue of Niobe. The soft, hazy

sunlight fell upon the scene, and gave to the whole a rich Oriental character, that was in harmony with the youthful cavalier's feelings. He approached the fountain, and startled from their sunny slumbers in its basin troops of gold fishes, while, at his footstep, beautiful birds, with a quick, musical chirp, flitted from the branches of a laurel near the fountain, and sought a retreat in an orange-tree on the farther side of the court.

"This is indeed a paradise, as I conceived when I first waked from insensibility after being brought hither," he said, seating himself upon an Indian settee placed beneath the laurel-tree; "how little do we Europeans know of the voluptuous life of southern climes. I shall have rare modes of luxury to bear back to Castile! and, if I could carry with me this houri of my paradise!—and, pray, what shall hinder me?—if I can persuade her to fall in love with a wandering cavalier, as I have certainly done with her. Ay de mi! I will neither say nor gainsay, but let love take its course. If Heaven has paired us above, we shall surely be wedded below. So I will e'en leave it to Heaven, devoutly trusting it will side with my heart's hopes."

Thus mused Don Henrique as he sat by the fountain, and his thoughts continued to flow in this current, aided by his recollection of all that Renault had related to him, until, imperceptibly, evening stole over the spot, and he was aroused from his meditations by the first notes of the nightingale singing to an early star. He rose with the intention of returning to the apartment he had left, but, seeing that the openings to the corridor between the pillars were alike on every side, he was at a loss to distinguish that by which he had issued; after a moment's reflection, he walked towards the verdant arch by which he believed he must have entered, and was about to pass through into the corridor, when he discovered that the door that should have answered to his own was partly screened by a circular curtain, and much smaller than the stately folding leaves that led to his apartment.

He was about to retreat, when a voice within thrilled to his soul. It was that of Azèlie. It was the first note of a song, which, in a low, plaintive, and most touching voice, she sang throughout, while he listened entranced. It told the story of her fate, and his heart wept for her. It told that she loved him, and it bounded with strange joy. It told of despair, and he could scarcely restrain the impulse to spring forward, cast himself at her feet, and bid her hope and live. Her voice accompanied no instrument, but flowed a simple strain of liquid, vocal melody, natural and warbling, but of that power which fills the soul with those exquisite sensations that have caused mankind to place oral music in the highest order of intellectual and human efforts. These are the words he listened to :

Love bringeth each other young maiden
A world of joyance and bliss ;
But, alas ! to me cometh laden
With nothing but wo's bitterness.
Wo's me !

He goeth with smiles in his eyes
To all other hearts, far and near ;
But to mine cometh laden with sighs,
To mine ever comes with a tear.
Wo's me !

Oh ! why will he come to my heart,
And fill me with grief and despair !
Cruel Love ! I prithee depart,
And to grieve my bosom forbear !
Wo's me !

Thou hast shown it the image of one,
Whom for me 'tis guilt to keep there !
Oh ! what hast thou cruelly done,
In so wickedly guiding him here ?
Wo's me !

His eyes thou hast filled with a charm,
His voice to my heart made a snare ;
Oh ! why hast thou wished to me harm ?
Love—Love thou ! I bid thee beware !
Wo's me !

Thou'st kill'd me, false Love, with thy dart ;
My heart with sorrow is torn ;
Thou hast acted the cruellest part,
In making me love but to mourn.
Wo's me !

I mourn for the calm of the tomb—
My spirit will soon be set free—
To soar where affection doth bloom,
Where true love requited shall be.
Joy's me !

The voice trembled, and seemed most full of sadness as she sang the last stanza.

Drawn insensibly nearer the door, lest one sweet note or accent should escape his entranced ear, Don Henrique found himself, when the song ended, standing within a step of the crimson curtain, which, half withdrawn from across the entrance, exposed a part of the interior. It was a lady's boudoir he saw at once by the hundred little delicacies that met his eye.

Silence had followed the music of the plaintive voice. His heart was touched by its echo still. He felt the influence, too, of the hour and time. It was twilight ; the soft, rosy light shed a delicate lustre over everything around him, and touched his feelings with the subdued harmony that prevailed. It was the hour of tender thought and gentle feelings : for sadness—for tears. Who has not experienced the power of evening ? Who has not loved to sit by the deep-shadowed casement, through which is faintly reflected the western red of the just departed sun, and give wing to thought ? How gentle are the images that come then, whether of memory or of fancy, to the soul ! How sad, how tender—often how full of quiet and pleasing melancholy ! How the heart loves to lose itself in the misty, dreamy world of its own creations ! How often does religion, like gentle dew from heaven, then fall upon it, and how naturally do tears then come into the eyes ! Most sacred hour ! Sabbath-time of the day ! How the heart loves its still communion with itself then, save in the bosoms of the dark and guilty. To such twilight is, indeed, a fearful time. They fly it, because they tremble to yield to a power which compels them to hold converse with themselves. With such, the sun is no sooner set, than the sacredness of the hour is desecrated by the intrusion of artificial light. Oh ! who that is innocent in heart, or does not

shrink from the knowledge of himself, and knows the blessed influence of the twilight-time upon his own feelings, would consent to part with its sweet pleasure, and deprive himself, in this world, of an enjoyment so intellectual and spiritual, that it may be termed a fore-taste of that which is to come !

Don Henrique's feelings were in tone with the hour, and the touching melody of Azèlie's voice filled his soul with the tenderest sensibility. He desired to mingle his feelings with hers ! To sooth her grief ; and, it must be said, to be once more, if but for a moment, within the influence of her beauty. Involuntarily he laid his hand upon the curtain—hesitated—became irresolute ; and then, as if imboldened by his love and the favouring hour, he gently lifted aside the drapery.

Within was Azèlie, kneeling before a small household shrine, her face buried in her dark tresses, which were dishevelled, and fell with the negligence of grief about her scarcely veiled neck. She was apparently in silent prayer. Her whole form was instinct with life, and heaved with strong emotion. At intervals, a faint moan reached his ear. On the altar burned a silver lamp, diffusing an odour of incense throughout the boudoir. The richness and luxury of the apartment scarcely arrested his glance ; his gaze rested on a single object, and, save the lovely worshipper, he saw nothing. He even stilled the beating of his heart, and, softly approaching her, removed his bonnet, and kneeled by her side. Oh, love ! what limit has thy power over the heart ! For a few moments he knelt by her, and then, in the softest whisper of tenderest solicitude and sympathy, breathed her name.

"Dearest brother !" she said, in a tone of grief, without lifting her head, "you have come to see me die !"

"Nay, sweet Azèlie, if love hath broken thy heart, love shall mend it again for thee. Dry up those starry fountains of tears, and love shall henceforward visit thee 'with smiles,'" said Don Henrique, speaking in a

tone so frank and generous, so soothing and tender, that her startled surprise at finding, instead of her brother, the young Spanish cavalier kneeling by her side, was in a measure lost in the words he spoke.

She at first lifted her head and looked upon him with wild alarm; but, as he proceeded, convinced by his words that he had heard her song, and knew the state of her heart, this emotion changed to one of maidenly shame. Her brow and bosom glowed with crimson; she attempted to say something, but her voice failed her; the blood rushed back to her heart; a deadly paleness overspread her face, and she sunk forward with her forehead upon the altar step. He thought she had become insensible, and cried with alarm, catching her in his arms to arrest her fall,

"I have killed her by my imprudence!"

Then, snatching up a flask of *eau de vie*, he was about to bathe her forehead and hands freely, when, finding herself in the arms of the young cavalier, the fugitive blood hastened again to restore the brightness to her cheek and lip, and, rising with a dignity most becoming, she said,

"I thank thee, signor, for thy proffered aid. Pray leave me! I have permitted a secret that I meant should have died with me to escape me, and can only atone for it by the deep maidenly shame that now burns my brow. Leave me, I pray thee, signor; and if thou art as good and generous as I believe thee to be, forget that thou hast ever seen me!"

"Dearest lady," he cried, in a tone most impassioned.

"Nay, mock me not, signor! *I am a quadroone!*"

"Heaven is my witness, lovely maid, I meant thee no mockery. I know thy history, thy condition, and its penalty."

"Then why art thou here? Fly and leave me for ever! It may not be that thou shouldst remain here!"

"Dearest Azèlie!" he said, with deep feeling, "I have been the involuntary listener to your confessed

love! Nay, turn not so deadly pale! Here, on my knees, I swear to thee 'tis requited."

"I may not listen to thee without guilt; thy love is shame and infamy! I pray thee leave me."

"Thy heart swells in thine eyes while thou biddest me go, dearest Azèlie! Wherefore be so cruel? I love thee."

"It is because thou lovest me—because thou art loved by me," she said, with fervour, "that I bid thee go!"

"Dearest and loveliest of women!" he cried, taking her hand, "let there be no dissimulation between thee and me. Accident has betrayed our mutual loves. Let us not mutually fill the cup of each other's misery. Heaven hath made us for one another, and I beg thee seek not, to thine own evident pain, to avert its decrees!"

"Nay, signor, Heaven never hath decreed guilt, nor will it let the strongest love of mortals hide crime committed under it. Go, I entreat thee! Each moment thou lingerest here is fatal to my peace."

"Crime! What mean thy words! Is it guilt to love?"

"*A quadroone*," she answered, with a supernatural effort at maintaining sufficient firmness.

"That word has given the key to all thy language and bearing," he said, with a countenance expressive of delight. "Thou hast done me wrong, sweet Azèlie. On such love as I offer, Heaven will smile. Here, kneeling at thy feet, I ask thee if thou wilt become my bride?"

"Thy *bride*!" she repeated, with a voice half trembling between hope and doubt.

"My honourable wife!" he said, solemnly, taking her hand and fervently pressing it to his lips.

"Wife—bride! his honourable wife! said he?" she repeated, unconsciously, aloud, as if lost and stunned by the strange words that fell on her ear.

"Even so, sweet Azèlie! Nay, look not so wildly!

Keep thy reason to her seat ! Wilt thou become my wife ?" and he kissed her brow.

"A wife, and the wife of him my soul loveth !" said she, with deep joy.

"Yes, be my own sweet wife."

"'Tis more joy than my heart can hold," she cried, with the most exquisite happiness in her voice and face.

"Then pour out its fulness into my bosom," he said, clasping her yielding form in his arms, and imprinting upon her lips the seal of his pure and honourable love.

Who may truly describe the happiness of two hearts thus united by the tenderest union of kindred souls ! How perfect had been love's work in those hours of watching, when, bending over his pillow, she drank in the delicious poison of her love ! Her touching sorrows and gentle beauty, as she kneeled by the altar, had sealed for ever the passion that had entered his bosom when he awoke and beheld her sleeping beside him ! Love had done much, very much, in a few short hours ; but his work can be done in a day or in an hour's time, and by a single glance as well as in years of uninterrupted fellowship. Azèlie suffered his arms to enfold her for a moment—a moment so happy that it compensated for all her life's sorrows ; and then lifted to his her tearful face, through the April clouds of which struggled the sunshine of her happy heart. He gazed on her with tender rapture, and again pressed her to his breast.

"My own sweet Azèlie," he exclaimed, looking down into her soft, grateful eyes ; "if I have made thee happy, thou hast made me happier still. Many maidens of many lands have I bowed down before in wondering adoration of their beauty, but never before has woman received the homage of my heart ! It has remained for thy retiring and modest beauty—for thine eyes' witchery and thy voice's fascination—for the charms of thy mind as well as those of thy person, to command the worship of my spirit. Thou knowest me not ; yet thy love, as it ever does in wom-

an, has ennobled its object. But fear not; thou hast placed thy affections on one who is not unworthy thyself, or the purity and fervour of thy affections. Thy eyes, I now see, would ask me who I am. Thou knowest me to be a Spanish cavalier and gentleman. Call me Don Henrique—nay, *Henrique* were sweeter from thy lips—and thou shalt, ere long, know what, but for reasons connected with thy safety, and that I may in secret observe for a time the doubtful conduct of another, I would now reveal. I pray thee, for the present, sweetest, let me be to thee Henrique.”

“Love hath no name nor rank! Be mine—love me still, as thy eyes tell me thou dost—and I seek to know nothing beyond *that thou lovest me!*” she said, in a tone so musical and soft that he rapturously kissed the lips that distilled such melody.

She withdrew blushing from his embrace, and a melancholy expression passed over her features.

“What is this, dearest? If my love hath offended thy virgin propriety, I pray thee pardon me, for love’s offences should have for excuse its love.”

“Thou hast not offended me, signor,” she answered; but, without lifting her large black eyes from the ground, as if sadness sat heavily on the fringed eyelids, “thou hast scarce offended; but I have thought,” she added, with artlessness, “that thou wilt not forget my condition—and despise where now thou lovest.”

“Dost thou believe I love thee, then?” he asked, with fervour.

“My heart tells me so. Nay, methinks I could not love thee as I do, didst thou not love me,” she answered, lifting to him her eyes, that were bright with affection, and then dropping them again upon the floor.

“Then, if thou believest this,” he answered, with passionate earnestness, “why fear that my love shall cease? ‘Thou doest me wrong, dearest,’ said he, with a countenance so full of sorrow that it was apparent his heart and happiness were bound up in her.

“Nay, then, I will not doubt; yet, if thou wert as constant and strong in thy love as I, thou couldst nev-

er but love ; for methinks, dearest Henrique," she said, placing a hand in his, and looking up into his eyes full of trust and confidence, "if I were a princess, loving thee as I do, I should not cease to love thee shouldst thou prove to be a—slave ! nay, a bandit of the forests or a pirate of the seas—thy hand steeped in blood—thy brow crossed with guilt !"

"Couldst thou love such a one ?"

"If he had won my virgin heart—not knowing him to be other than he seemed—where my heart was given, there would my love be !"

"Thou art a noble and true-hearted woman ! Thou hast scarce loved a sea-pirate or a chief of Ladrones, my sweet Azélie," he said, smiling ; "methinks love which is so true as thine should have better reward."

"I need none, save to know each day thou lovest me more than thou didst the last."

"Dost thou also wish to have me proved an honest man ?"

"The wish could not be in my breast were it not the offspring of suspicion."

"And dost thou not suspect me ?"

"No. Wert thou false and guilty, thou couldst never be so dear to me !"

"This is confiding, trusting, dear woman's reasoning ; it is this with which she stills those unworthy doubts that may not exist where love is. To her the bright moon is all light and purity, forgetting that the portion turned from her eye is dark and all unilluminated," he said, rather addressing himself than her. "Now, as thou hast trusted me, dearest, and believest I will honour thy deep affection with my hand as I have done with my heart—as all doubts, and fears, and apprehensions are to be buried under hope and love, truth and troth, let us banish every thought that can ruffle the placid bosom of our affections."

"Thou hast made me happy, my Henrique, by lifting me to thy heart, and elevating me above that humiliating consciousness of degradation by birth and condition which ever, like a chain about my soul,

bowed my spirits to the earth. 'Tis a strange delight for me to hold equal communion with one whom by education I have been taught to regard as—"

"Nay," he said, seeing her blush and hesitate, "I do not verily believe thou art of this race! Renault suggested it by a word he let fall! The beauty of that eye; the delicate damask on that cheek, which the sun, in ripening, hath just browned, like a rare peach he would dye with his favourite shade; those coral lips, and that mouth full of liquid pearls, like the ivory keys of some rich instrument, giving out music whenever you speak; those eyes, like the starry, midnight sky; those lily hands—"

"Nay, nay, Signor Henrique! I prithee stop," she cried, laughing, and laying the hand he would have taken to illustrate his words upon his lips. He imprinted a kiss upon the fair member as it came in contact with them, in retaliation, and then continued,

"Truly, my lovely one, I do believe thou art of other blood than that thou thinkest."

"But my brother—he is even fairer than I," she said, her eyes at first sparkling with the hopes his words inspired, and then dropping with doubt, showing that she felt she could not entertain a hope so unexpectedly and strangely started.

"Fairer than thyself for a man where his bonnet hath protected his temples from the sun. Yet his father is known, and he hath told me his quadroone-mother is scarce darker than he has seen Spanish ladies."

"She is my mother also. My father may have been a fair man, even as this Marquis of Caronde. Do not, I pray thee, excite hopes, signor, that have no other foundation, alas! than in thy wishes," she said, sighing.

"Nay, I could love thee no more wert thou to prove a Princess of France."

"I fear thou hast repented thy love for a quadroone, and wouldst fain defend it by seeking to make me what I am not, one of thy own race," she said, with gentle reproof.

"Thou dost me injustice, dearest Azèlie! I love thee with all my nature; and it is my great love that would do this for thee. Wert thou an angel, as almost thou seemest to me to be, my love would have thee a seraph, and, being a seraph, I would see thee, for the love I bear thee, still more than a seraph. Love, and not my foolish pride, would prove thee to be more than thou believest thyself to be. Dost thou believe I speak truly, my little trembler?"

"Forgive me that I doubted thy love for an instant. If I perchance offend again, let it not be forgotten by thee that this sudden happiness of thy love hath weakened my poor heart. Hast thou not seen a weary-winged bird, who, after a hundred leagues of restless flight above the wide sea, cometh suddenly o'er the mast of a stately ship, and, for joy at the unlooked-for resting-place, hovereth long between hope and fear ere he settle upon it; when, finding it secure, he folds his long-spread wings, and fearless sleeps upon the rocking perch. I am this weary bird, and thou my stately bark! Bear with me a while; I will, ere long, rest in thy heart, whence nor fear, nor the rocking of the waves of doubt or of mistrust shall move me!"

"While thou speakest, I think thee each moment lovelier, and more worthy of my love!" he said, folding her to his heart. "Now, I prithee, sweet, tell me wherefore I found thee weeping when I came, like a rude wooer as I am, into thy boudoir."

"Thou hast all my heart, Henrique, if I may call thee thus, signor, as my heart prompts me to do, and thou shouldst know its griefs—now griefs no more! My mother hath—nay, I know not how to speak of aught connected with my condition with maidenly propriety—"

"Thou wouldst speak of the young Marquis Caronde, doubtless. I then know thy story from Renault."

"Not of *him*! Yet, as thou knowest the nature of his persecution, I may tell thee, without the necessity of embarrassing detail, that ~~my~~ mother hath taken of-

fence at him, and is now determined to avenge herself for her disappointment by surrendering me to the new Spanish governor," she said, trembling, as she thought of the count's looks that morning at mass, of his power, and her late helplessness.

"To Osma!" he repeated, with astonishment and indignation. "Hast thou seen him? Hath he beheld thee?" he asked, with the most intense eagerness.

"This morning in the Cathedral," she answered. She then briefly informed him of what he was before ignorant, that the captain-general had gone to mass at the head of his troops, and that her mother, on hearing the order for the citizens also to attend, had commanded her to go with her, without explaining to her the reason for her wishing it; that, on arriving there, she sought a conspicuous place to kneel with her, near the spot reserved for the governor, whose attention was soon drawn to her, by her mother's obvious desire to attract it.

"By thy incomparable beauty rather," he said, gazing on her with a lover's admiration as she told her embarrassed story.

"Seeing I became the object of his regards, I trembled with foreboding of coming evil," continued Azèlie. "My mother's voice and manner terrified me. My veil concealed my tears, and I returned home to weep and pray. Renault was absent, and my mother remained with me, threatening, entreating, and commanding me to submit to the fate she had destined for me."

"Poor child! thou hast been persecuted indeed. Didst thou not, gentle girl, then think of the guest beneath thy roof?" he asked, with a smile.

"I did, and was tempted to fly to thee and seek protection, for my mother had threatened I should soon see my Spanish lord beneath her roof."

"And wherefore didst thou not, dearest?"

"Because—because—" she blushed and was silent.

"Because thy love held thee back, was't not?" he asked, tenderly.

"How dost thou so well read my heart ere thou hast learned its language?"

"Because it is translated in thine eyes. Now I will tell thee, Azèlie, I had more than suspected mischief would come to thee from Count Osma, but rather by his own discovery of the fair treasure his new province held, than through the unnatural agency of thy mother; therefore did I determine to remain unknown here, till I could ensure thee, for thy brother's sake (for I knew not then I should love thee as I do), protection. It becomes me more than ever now to preserve this secrecy, and even from thee to withhold my name till I can claim thee as my bride. Where is thy noble brother?"

"He hath not returned since he left after midnight."

"I would see him, that I may give him a brother's hand, and, together with him, plot against this scheme of thy mother's. Hath she had communication with Osma since mass?"

"No; yet I left her writing half an hour ago, an unusual occupation with her, and suspect (for fear is ever active) that I am the cause."

"And Osma the object of the correspondence, I doubt not. Hath she sent a messenger away? Ha! there is a footstep without the window, and yonder glides a dark figure into the avenue."

"It must be *she*—the sorceress," exclaimed Azèlie, with surprise.

"And the servant of thy wicked mother?" he demanded.

"Nay, harm her not," she cried, holding him from the pursuit to arrest her; "she is no friend of my mother, but a foe! She must be here for good to me, and not evil. I have thought several times that I heard a noise of some one moving without."

"She has been a listener to our conversation—nay, a witness of our pledged loves."

"Fear no evil from her, whoever she may be; she has taken strange interest in me," said Azèlie. In a few words she then related to him all that she knew of her.

"It is very strange ; this relation confirms me more than ever in my opinion that thou art not of the race thou—"

"Cease, Henrique," she said, playfully ; "I shall again accuse you of thinking me unworthy of your love, which, indeed, is too true !"

"Thou art worthy of all love—to share a throne with me," he said, with affectionate enthusiasm.

She looked up gratefully into his face, and was about to reply from the fulness of her heart, when an object suddenly darkened the window. Both turned quickly, and beheld, looking in upon them, a broad, laughing, impudent visage, that seemed infinitely to enjoy their surprise. The Spaniard laid a hand upon his weapon, but the risible expression of the intruder's face instantly excited emotions in him opposite to those of personal alarm, and, recognising in him Gobin the First of the council-chamber, he said, gayly,

"Welcome, *bon cousin*. Have thee grace !"

"Gobin, what do you here ?" asked Azélie, smiling, yet vexed at the intrusion.

"Gramercy to thee, cousin Spain !" answered Gobin, leaping into the room, and paying no heed to the question. "An' I saw not thee killed last night, wi' seven inches o' steel 'neath thy ribs, may I ne'er drink a goblet wi' cousin Osma to-night."

"Thou wilt then go dry ; for truly I am alive, as thou seest, cousin Gobin."

"Tell me thy secret o' coming to life again wi' a hole through the body, and I'll teach thee a trick I know at marbles, cousin Spain ! Name thy chirurgion ! Out wi't, gossip !"

"Thou seest here both the chirurgion and the charm," he said, looking at Azélie.

"Then will I have her burned for a witch, an' she do not presently use her witchery to heal my finger-joint. Dost see ? I got it shot off i' the wars ! An' I were not sent for by mother Ninine, I'd recount thee the exploit. But I-ha' a friend at home, a rogue that hath his valour in his tongue, will tell thee it some

day. He hath a rare wit at a lie, and I have learned a round way at it from him."

"Didst thou say my mother had sent for thee?" asked Azélie, interrupting him as he rambled from one subject to another, after his light and wandering manner.

"Marry, did I, sweet hyacinth! Am I not a messenger to and from? Goeth a billet save through Gobin's fingers! Cometh a love-gage that Gobin hath not the handling o't? Hath a maiden got the love fever, doth she not send for Doctor Gobin? Doth a youth pine for love, an' I have not the secret o't? Marry, Gobin hath been sent for, and what's the world's matter if he have? Here's matter, indeed, that two lovers within the town's walls are come together, and Gobin never the wiser."

"Thou shalt have little reason to complain that thou art never the richer," said Don Henrique, placing a purse of gold in his hand, at the same time covertly admiring the confusion of Azélie at Gobin's free words.

"This hath weight, and needeth no tongue to speak for it," said Gobin, weighing the gold in his palm. "Thou art a cavalier of metal; and, before I saw the colour o' the coin thou didst carry, I made up my mind that sweet hyacinth should have my consent to love thee. Methinks, cousin, next to a woman's bright eye cometh a broad gold piece."

"Thou showest thy discretion and taste, *mon cousin*!"

"And in that thou hast discovered these virtues in me, thou hast more wit than ordinary. All men have not wit. The run o' mankind are demi-witted; I will show you three fools out of every five men you take me in a crowd. Wherefore do such men call Gobin a fool, marry? Verily, because, unlike them, he hath a golden vein o' wit streaking his folly, while what they have, like a little treacle in gingerbread, is so thinned by spreading, that I will find you a green lemon that hath more sweetness in't."

"Let thy wit, then, manifest itself in thy discretion, good fool!" said Don Henrique; "thou didst most

truly behold me fall wounded. I am restored by good nursing to the sound state you see me in ; this gentle maiden hath enemies, and I am now here to protect her. If, as I think, from thy words and manner towards her, thou hast a regard for her, I pray thee keep secret my presence here. I trust to thy honour and friendship for Azélie to do this, rather than to the trifling gift of gold thou hast received from me ; for I am assured *mon cousin* Gobin will scorn bribery."

"Verily, cousin Spain, thou art a *bueno caballero* ; and if I betray thee or my sweet hyacinth, may I not touch goblet o' wine the night with gossip Osma."

"Wilt thou see the Spanish governor this night ? Dost thou not fear for thy head, as ex-governor Gobin ?"

"Head never sat safer on a pair of shoulders ! Hast thou not heard he giveth a banquet to the bloods o' wits o' the town ! If Gobin stay away, folly would reign."

To his surprise, Don Henrique then learned from him that a proclamation for a public *levée* had been sent out, and that all the town were at that moment flocking thither.

"Go to her who sent thee ; when thou hast thine errand, come this way secretly ere thou deliverest it."

CHAPTER IV.

SCENE WITHIN THE PALACE.

GOBIN instantly departed through the window, and gliding along beneath a hedge of altheas, came to a winding walk terminating at a lattice on the other side of the *casa* inhabited by the quadroone-mother. Here, silent, stern, and plotting, she had been impatiently waiting since the return of the servant despatched to seek for Gobin, whose tact and address in any private

mission rendered him the fit instrument of an intriguing woman.

"Where hast thou loitered, Gobin? The sun hath been down half an hour, and yet thou didst promise me to be here with his setting."

"Wouldst have me slave to my words?" asked Gobin, as he approached her; "because my tongue hath said 'trot,' must my feet trot, forsooth, unless they have a mind. A man's tongue hath its own work to do, and so have his feet, and other corporeal appendages."

"Hist! I have a message for thee to take."

"Give it me, *maman*! I will send it by the king's trumpeter I have at home, who hath taken service with me; for I have a banquet on hand myself."

"Nay, thy voice is too loud! This I would have thee do demands secrecy. Be trusty, and I will give thee a gold clasp for thy silver chain. I would have thee bear this *pacquet* to the palace, and place it privately in the hands of the Spanish governor."

"Never errand chimed better with a man's will, *maman*! I am on foot thither, to pay my respects to cousin Spain, and hob and nob wi' him o'er a flagon of Oporto. Since I ha' been i' the wars I ha' taken to Port—it has such a bloody complexion. Ne'er see a man drink Port but thou mayst safely swear he hath smelled gunpowder."

"Out upon thy fool's prate, Gobin. Hie thee with this to the Governor Osma, and be thou speedy—and secret as speedy. Go, as thou camest, by the garden wall."

"Thou hast the highest wall i' all the town to get over, *maman*; thou shouldst ha' a gate cut i' it."

"There is a gate, Gobin," she said, smilingly, "but 'tis known to no one save myself."

"It must be one o' the stone pannels, then; for I ha' looked it all along for a place to put my toes in, and thought, if thou wouldst swing one o' the slabs on a pivot or a brace o' hinges, 'twould be a charity for the urchins that love oranges and nectarines. An' I

had not learned to climb when I was a boy, I had lost the eating o' much nice fruit I ha' had the enjoyment of."

"Thou art a rogue, and hast already paid thyself thrice over for thy service, Gobin! But go now, and be secret, and I will load thee with fruit."

"Five nectarines, seven sweet oranges, and a pineapple, with three pounds of grapes, *maman*, in the morning, for me! I drink wine to-night, and fruit hath a pleasant flavour after. I saw a hawk in thy dove-cote but now, *maman*!" he added, with that singular want of *morale* and love of mischief so characteristic of that class in whom reason and folly are ever at odds; each alternately holding the supremacy for a moment, but with such uncertain tenure that they can at no time be trusted, and are ever as variable and uncertain as the winds.

He bounded from her with a laugh of cunning and intelligence as he spoke these mischievous words, which for an instant seemed to convey to her something more than his usual jesting way; for her lips parted, and she bent forward as if to demand an explanation. But his instant disappearance and the engrossing subject of her thoughts left no room in her mind for so slight an external impression; so, giving full scope to her ambitious fancy, she threw herself back upon her *fauteuil*, and was soon lost in the contemplation of the results of the bold step she had adventured. Knowing the human heart well, she had little doubt of the most triumphant issue of her hopes; and she now began to look complacently to the consummation of her revenge upon the young Marquis of Caronde, to the punishment of Renault's pride, and Azélie's most singular rebellion. She did not fail, also, to contemplate the personal consideration she should receive from her association with the governor; a consideration which had as deep a seat in her ambitious soul as any of the other contributory motives. She was, also, herself a beautiful woman still; and there was not altogether absent from her mind a secret con-

sciousness of the power of her own matured charms, and the probable influence they might have over the paramour she sought for her child ; which influence she found herself already studying how to use, when acquired, to promote her own aspiring and covetous views. Thus did this dangerous and wicked woman plot the misery of a lovely girl, and in the secret closet of her heart hatch rife iniquity.

During Gobin's brief absence, Azèlle gave Don Henrique some insight into his singular character, and assured him of his devotedness both to herself and Renault, so far as a creature like him was capable of having fixed attachments.

"Hast thou a message, Gobin?" he asked, when the fool reappeared.

"A message in a note—but not a love-billet, gossip, for there be a gray beard o' the one side, and full two score o' years on the other," answered Gobin, showing the outside of the packet that had been intrusted to him.

"It is to Osma, as I suspected," said Don Henrique, with a flush of indignant feeling.

"Heaven now preserve me from evil!" ejaculated Azèlle, clasping her hands together and prayerfully lifting her eyes.

"Nay, tremble not, sweetest! Thou hast no cause for fear."

"Not for myself alone, but for you also. If this dreadful Spaniard should exert his power, he will make you the first sacrifice."

"Do not, I pray thee, give way to fear, Azèlle. Osma hath no power to harm me; and my love shall shelter thee beneath its wing. Go, good fool! bear the letter as thou art commanded to do," he said, without taking the note from Gobin's hand, though questioning if the circumstances did not authorize him to read it. But his purpose was sufficiently answered in noting the superscription, and in satisfying his mind as to the nature of the quadroone-mother's correspondence.

"Now, sweet Azèlie, let not this trouble thee," he continued, after Gobin disappeared in the darkness of the orangerie, turning and affectionately embracing her; "neither thou nor I shall come to danger. It only becomes me to guard the more carefully thy safety. Prithée is it not time thy brother Renault were returned?"

"He should have been here at noon."

"Remain in your room, that I may feel while I am absent that you are in safety, and await my return. If he come, say nothing to him of this note—nay, nor even of our love, dearest! I will myself open it to him. And bid him wait here, and leave thee not until I come. I will go out and observe the conduct of the governor, and learn the issue of this matter between himself and thy mother. Now bless thee, and let thy thoughts run only on happiness and me. If thou art in danger, a thousand swords at my bidding will leap from their scabbards to defend thee! So content thee, sweetest! I will not be long away. Hast thou no cloak and slouching bonnet of thy brother's, for I would do secretly what I contemplate?"

She soon furnished him with these, nor by word or look betrayed any doubt, at such a moment, of his truth and constancy. She measured his love by her own.

Parting tenderly from her in whom his soul seemed to be bound up, as hers truly was in him, he entered the garden, and, traversing the shaded avenue in which Gobin had disappeared, he came to a high wall, which he scaled by fastening a cord Azèlie had given him to a catalpa that grew against it, and lightly descended into an obscure lane on the other side. Upon gaining one of the principal streets, the current of the citizens hastening to the *levée* indicated the direction of the palace and the Place d'Armes.

Wrapped in his ample cloak, and with his sombrero slouched above his eyes, he rapidly glided along by the wall to shun the light of the moon, which was just rising and flooding the city with light. Arrived at the

square, he mingled with the banqueters and entered the hall of audience. Avoiding the sight of Osma, who sat receiving the homage rather than congratulations of the citizens, lest he should be haughtily commanded to come forward and do him honour, he remained in a distant part of the hall, and silently witnessed the stirring scene around him. The interview between the count and the councillors did not escape him, and, when he retired with them to the private banquet-chamber, he suspected treachery would come of it. For a moment he forgot the object that brought him thither in his anxiety for the safety of those gentlemen; and, having succeeded in gaining the door just after they entered it, he was near the president when he gave the message to the young *courreur du bois*. He did not hear its purport, but the president's manner confirmed the suspicion which he had entertained, more from his knowledge of the bitter vengeance of Osma's character than from any open betrayal of his intentions by his conduct. He was about to speak to the president and warn him, but his instant return to the banquet-chamber prevented him.

"At least there is no present danger to be apprehended," he said, mentally. "He has now another passion than love to gratify, and, till his vengeance against the councillors be satisfied, he will scarce give himself to intrigue. Methinks I did allow my sense of honour to go too far in letting that missive pass to him with the seal unbroken. I must now let watchful sagacity discover what honour then forbade. I know Garcia of Osma well, and am assured he hath a determination to harm these councillors. Dare he poison them in their cups? I will, at least, try to save them, and must risk discovery in doing so. Ha! there is Montejo!"

At this instant his eye rested on a young Spanish officer, in the uniform of an *aidecamp*, lounging with one or two other cavaliers through the room.

"Montejo!" he said, in a low whisper, and, adroitly leaving a ring in his hand, he crossed over to the other side of the room without being regarded by the others.

The young officer started, glanced at the signet, and, with a look expressive of delighted surprise, left his companions, and was soon in the shadow of a column by his side.

"Montejo!" said Don Henrique, lifting his hat a little way from his face and exposing his features, "start not; thou seest in me no ghost!"

"It is thyself, then?" he exclaimed, embracing him. "I knew the signet, but ne'er dreamed thou wert the bearer. *Gracias-a-dios!* Osma gave out that you were lying ill sorely wounded, and even Garcilaso mourned you dead! This is a miracle."

"I was stunned rather than wounded, and am now nearly quite as well as before the affray. How is brave Garcilaso? A stouter soldier is not in all Spain. Heaven keep breath in him, and soon give him back to us, for I do owe my life to him."

"He hath good attendance, and will soon be in the saddle again? Where hast thou hid thyself?"

"Montejo!" said Don Henrique, gravely, "I must give thee my confidence, and have, in return, thy faith."

"I am thine in all things, my Henrique," he answered, with enthusiasm.

"I have reason to remain disguised and concealed, that I may defend innocence and punish this guilty Osma. Scarce one sun hath rolled over his head since he came to the government, ere his restless spirit began to seek out mischief. There is a fair being in this town, sister to a citizen who bore me wounded to his house, whom I love."

"Love, Don Henrique!"

"Nay, will make my wife, so soon as the obstacles my careful father hath put in my way shall be removed. 'Till then 'twere dangerous, as thou knowest, to both of us to have our secret divulged."

"Ye would both be soon united in Heaven by the headsman, methinks."

"I make thee my confidant, Montejo, and may need thy services. Osma himself hath seen her at mass, and thou knowest what will be the consequences if he be not counter-met at every point."

"May I ask who is this wonderful creature that hath captivated a heart which the brightest beauties of Madrid have sought vainly to win?"

"Thou shalt see her anon. Meanwhile, I would ask thee if thou dost suspect nothing hidden beneath this banquet, and especially the private entertainment for the councillors?"

"Verily I did think, when I saw them enter there, they would scarce come out without Osma's having got something out of them."

"Dost thou know him so well—and is this the depth of thy suspicion?"

"He hath no motive to imprison them now that the town is his, save in punishment for their resistance, and in vengeance for his former defeat."

"There thou hast it! Those men will scarce behold another sun rise unless we save them. I read their doom in Osma's eyes."

"Thy lady-love's father is one of them, by my beard!"

"Nay, it is for humanity's sake, and that Spain may have no more blood to answer for than need be shed. I count upon thy aid. Here now is Loyola," he added, as a stout Spanish captain, with bold and pleasing features, came near. "Speak to him, and let him know I am here."

"I and my men are at your service, signor," said the captain, coming up and addressing him after Montejo had spoken a few words with him. "Heaven be thanked those knaves did not wound thee to the death."

"To all, save thyself and Montejo, I am still confined to my couch with my wound. I know your affection for me, and that you may be trusted."

"Till death," answered both in the same voice.

"I have reason to believe Osma meditates a crime that will bring lasting shame to the Spanish arms. It must be prevented. Go, select fifty of thy command, and march them to the court between the palace and the prison. As I came by, cautiously inspecting the inlets to the palace, I noticed a small gate which leads

to a dark stairway, and which I am assured, from the position of this inner banquet-room, has communication with it. Go! thou wilt find me there to receive thee!"

The captain departed, and Montejo and Don Henrique, after some farther conference in reference to the course ultimately to be taken if action should become necessary, separated, the former going to his duties as warden of the city guards. It was a few moments after Montejo left him that Don Henrique so opportunely aided Estelle in the rude attack made upon her life by Rascas.

When Don Henrique at length arrived at the postern, he immediately paced before it, waiting for De Loyola until the third of an hour had elapsed, when, being anxious for the safety of the councillors, and to confirm or remove his suspicions, he entered the passage and ascended the staircase which he had believed to communicate with the banquet-room. He listened; but the door was so solid, and being also curtained on the inner side, he could detect at first only the indistinct sound of tongues, and occasionally the louder accents of Count Osma. Soon he heard the noise of commotion, the tramp of many feet, and plainly distinguished the stern voice of Renault. He then attempted to force the door, but in vain. He, however, learned enough to be aware that the councillors had indeed been in danger, and that they had been rescued by some other hand than his own; and this he knew must have been that of Renault. He remembered, too, that the messenger he had seen the president despatch from the hall wore a uniform similar to the quadroon's.

"Renault hath done this," he exclaimed, "and Osma is his prisoner! My presence will be necessary to prevent revolution or carnage arising out of it!"

Making another effort to force the door, and finding it unavailing, he descended the stairs with the intention of gaining the banquet-room by the front of the palace. As he reached the last step, the door above suddenly opened, and the councillors appeared. Withdrawing himself within a dark recess at the foot of the

passage, he there remained until he saw them pass forth in safety. He then reascended to the half-open door, and, perforating the intervening arras with the point of his dagger, witnessed the whole subsequent scene, prepared to appear in it if his presence should prove necessary, and, by his influence over Renault, prevent evil consequences from breaking out of this angry state of things.

De Loyola had in the mean while arrived, and secreted his men within the dark shadow of an angle of the prison wall, ready for action and instant service. The subsequent events all passed under Don Henrique's observation ; and, while he commended the extraordinary forbearance of Renault, he felt the strongest indignation against the thwarted noble.

"Nature hath made Osma a cutthroat, but fortune hath made him a governor," he said, as he looked upon the scene. "Had he done this thing, he should have answered for it with his head, or justice hath taken wing and fled from Spain ! Ah, love hath had a hand in it," he added, as he saw Estelle appear, half disguised, and throw herself between her father and Renault. "I thank Heaven I did her such good service in the hall. She was then, doubtless, seeking these brave men, whom she hath guided by that secret way. Providence hath these councillors, or Spain's honour, or both, under its most marked protection."

Surprised, astonished, and indignant at all he had been an unseen observer of, and having, from what passed before him, got a key to all else connected with the count's treachery, and the means by which it had been so signally defeated, he was tempted, after he saw him left alone with Sulem, to enter and confront him, and on the spot challenge him to wash out with his blood the stain he had put upon the knightly honour of a Spanish noble, as well as the reproach his country had suffered through his discovered treachery. But the conversation that followed between him and the slave, in relation to Azèlie, bound him to the spot with a burning ear ; and when he saw him depart

with the Moor to enter his cabinet, he prepared to draw aside the hangings and follow, lest he should lose sight of him, when the presence of Gobin caused him again to draw back.

He was compelled to amuse himself with the fool's solitary banquet and soliloquies for a few moments, trusting he would soon take his departure, or fall overcome with wine beneath the table. His patience at length became exhausted, and he was about to discover himself, when he heard the footsteps of the count approaching the banquet-room. He was rewarded for his delay by witnessing his interview with Gobin, and the delivery of the quadroone-mother's note. Anticipating the count's movements from the words he let fall, as well as from the expression of his countenance, he hastily descended the staircase, and withdrew in the shadows at the foot of it as Osma himself appeared at the head. The latter came down, passed the spot without perceiving him, and pursued his way towards the dwelling of the quadroone-mother.

An idea, bold as it was congenial to his feelings, was instantly suggested to Don Henrique's mind. Crossing the court to where the men were posted, he called the captain aside.

"Now, my brave De Loyola, doubtless thou wilt be grieved to know that there will be no fighting to-night. The occasion for which I called thee out is passed. But I have yet something for thy love to do for me."

"Name it, signor, and it shall be done, if it were to put Osma himself under arrest."

"Nay, thou traitor! 'tis a love matter. I have been made captive by a maiden here, and, in revenge, would make her captive also. Thou knowest the captain of the brigantine I came in hath a friendship for me."

"He would put himself under thy orders to sail to the moon!" said the captain, divining his intentions.

"I believe thee; I would have thee seek Montejo, and send him on board, with all secrecy, and tell Captain Estecheria I will be on board within the hour;

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and that, before midnight, he must be ready to weigh anchor for Cuba, and thence to Spain."

"Spain—*Viva!* Would to Heaven thou wouldst take all thy good friends with thee!" said Loyola, in the warmth of his feelings at the recollection of his country.

"Thou shalt come, and also Montejo, and all who love me better than Osma. Come with me till I show thee where I would have thee meet me with thy men, lest I should fall into danger by the way. Then go on thy errands, and in an hour await me by the garden wall I will presently show thee."

De Loyola accompanied him within sight of the garden, and then parted from him with a promise to return before the expiration of the hour.

"Be silent and speedy, my brave friend!" he said, turning from him and hastening forward after the Count of Osma, whom he saw at the same moment turn into the lane that bounded the wall, in company with one who met him there. A troop of cavalry, at the same instant, came thundering from the quarter of the barracks, passing him at a round trot in the direction of the city gates.

Scarcely heeding the circumstance at such a moment, save that he was detained by its passage a few seconds, he hastened forward into the lane, and saw Osma and his companion, who had evidently been waiting for him, disappear through a gate in the wall. Approaching the spot, he looked in vain for the same entrance, but in the whole surface of the wall none was apparent to his eye. Wondering not a little at the means by which he had effected an entrance, he flew to the cord by which he had himself descended, and scaled the wall, not seeing that he himself was dogged by a third person. He then cautiously followed the path that he believed must lead to the apartments of the quadroone-mother, which, as he suspected, he beheld Osma in the act of entering. Satisfied with this hasty observation, he hastened to the boudoir he had left two hours before to play the spy upon the crafty count. Without

alarming Azélie with the knowledge of the presence of the Condé, whom he expected soon enough to appear in her apartment, he seated himself by her side, and amused her with light conversation, while, like a brave man, he prepared himself to receive the guilty intruder.

CHAPTER V.

SCENE WITHIN THE GARDEN-WALLS.

THE individual with whom the Count of Osma stopped to communicate in the street near the garden was a confidential slave of Ninine. He led him to one of the slabs fixed like a pannel in the centre of each section of the wall, and, having touched it about an inch from the lower corner, it swung inward, and admitted them into the garden. The slave then led the way rapidly towards the *casa*. With his hand upon his sword-hilt, as if guarding against treachery, followed the bold and wicked count, who, in the pursuit of the object of his passion, was singularly blind or indifferent to the danger of trusting himself abroad in a hostile city at such an hour unattended. He was rapidly conducted through the windings of the thickly-planted garden, whose trees and plants loaded the atmosphere with the most delicious odours, while the disturbed songsters of the fragrant groves flitted from branch to branch at his advance, emitting tremulous and broken notes.

When the slave came near the window that opened from the ground into the luxurious apartment of the quadroone-mother, he stopped silently and pointed towards it. Then, crossing his hands upon his breast, stood in a statue-like attitude. The count passed him, and proceeded towards the Venetian casement, which,

partly open, showed within a gorgeous chamber, softly lighted by shaded lamps of roseate hue, shedding around a soft and subdued twilight of the richest and most seductive character. Ottomans, lounges, and *fauteuils* of crimson velvet and silk, with carpets from Turkish looms, met the surprised glance of the Spaniard, who, not unused to luxury, had scarce beheld in Spain more splendour than now flashed upon his eyes through the half-open lattice. On a lounge near the window, the evening breeze just lifting the raven curls from her temples, reclined Ninine, the beautiful quadroone-mother. Her alert ear caught the sound of approaching footsteps. With a triumphant flush of joy she rose, and with an air of indolent grace, that became her voluptuous and languid beauty, threw open the blind, and beheld her expected visitant.

"A fair eve to thee, noble signor," she said, in the easy, self-possessed tone of one who felt that her own charms as well as the object of his coming placed them upon an equality.

"And a pleasant one to thee," he answered, with that air of finished gallantry which marked him as one of the most courteous cavaliers of his time; and he kissed her extended hand ere he seated himself on the same lounge by her side. "By my knighthood! thy charms rival thy daughter's!"

"Hast thou come to woo mother or daughter?" she asked, with a gratified smile, that threatened to beguile him from his first purpose.

"Nay, tempt me not, sorceress," he said, smiling, "I would fain see this Haidée! If I have to answer for worshipping other than the Blessed Mary this morning, thou shalt come in for punishment also. By the rood! thou didst do a sacrilege in taking so much beauty with thee to prayers."

"It was that I might offer it on the altar of thy love."

"Thou hast full confidence in her charms, and, i' faith! in my susceptibility. But thou didst send the bolt truly to the mark. Her loveliness hath captiva-

ted me. From her costume and thine, as well as thy dark style of beauty, I know thee to be of the lovely race of quadroones, with whom marriage is not lawful."

"Nor desirable, signor, so that our beauty purchase for us the hearts and fortunes of men! The proudest wife can boast no more," answered the quadroone, giving utterance to the bold sentiments of her class.

"But methinks a woman should marry for her honour's sake."

"A woman's honour lieth in the constancy of her love. And love hath ever proved most constant when 'tis free."

"This is strange doctrine," said Osma, surprised at sentiments so extraordinary from the lips of any woman, to whom marriage is one of the greatest and best gifts of Heaven, and at a mode of thinking so at variance with feminine views in other countries.

"Is there no such thing, then, as honour with you?"

"Yes, signor. Never was a quadroone maiden known to be false to her lord."

"But what pledge has he of her truth?"

"Her honour."

"But she hath it no longer."

"Hath the wife no longer honour when she hath become a wife?"

"But she is an honourable wife."

"And education has taught the quadroone what the laws have taught the wife, that the highest crime she can be guilty of is to be false to him to whom love has united her. Love and inbred honour are pledges of constancy; and to these she is never false. A wife's honour may be fortified by fear; a quadroone's is by love."

"If she do not love?"

"She must obey her mother, if no better choice may be made."

"She will then prove false."

"She will die first, as some have done, signor."

"Can they not be admitted into convents if they wish?"

"A quadroone-nun! No, signor!"

"Neither the convent nor matrimony; they have, then, no alternative but death or splendid misery. By mine honour, thy words have touched me! I would not bring unhappiness to thy daughter if she cannot love me!"

"She is gentle, and her heart is free, signor. Time and convenience will soon enable thee to win Azèlie's affections."

"Azèlie! said you Azèlie?" he demanded, starting with singular surprise.

"Azèlie! 'Tis an odd Moorish name, but—"

"Speak it no more!" he said, recovering himself. "Ha! what is this?" he cried, as a pomegranate struck the floor at his feet.

He looked out through the window, and beheld a pair of glittering eyes fixed upon him from the shrubbery. Drawing his sword, he rushed forth, when Rascas came forward and met him.

"Villain, is it thou? What of the councillors?"

"The troops I ordered out by thy command have just passed by on their way to the gates at the top of their speed."

"And thou—how camest thou hither? Hast dogged me, traitor?" he demanded, with fierce suspicion.

"Nay, signor; as I rode through yonder street at their head, I saw and recognised thy form and step, as well as thy hound, when thou enteredst the garden. I should have passed on, but saw that a person was following, and evidently playing the spy upon you. Drawing rein, I watched his motions, saw him scale the wall, and descend into the garden after you. I dismounted, and, getting over the wall by a cord he had forgotten to draw up after him, tracked him to the apartment of—"

"Of whom?"

"Azèlie, the beautiful quadroone!" he answered, with malicious triumph in his eyes as he delivered

this intelligence, well-guessing at the object of the count.

"Didst see his face?"

"Not distinctly; but I could swear he is none of the citizens."

"Perhaps it is this Renault, her brother?"

"Nay, I know the quadroon's height and air. 'Tis not he! I will show thee, if thou wilt follow me, signor."

"Lead on," said Osma, grasping his weapon with determined vengeance.

"Softly, signor, for cooing doves are easily alarmed."

Desiring Ninine, who had not heard this conversation, to await his return a few moments, he rapidly followed his subtle guide across the orangerie to the path that conducted to the maiden's lattice.

Don Henrique was seated at the feet of Azèlie, with his sword across his knees, and his disguise still on, recounting the part Renault had taken in the events of the night, yet with his eye fixed watchfully and expectingly on the door communicating from the boudoir with the apartments of the mother. His back was therefore partly turned to the Count of Osma, who stealthily approached the window behind his cat-like guide. Azèlie sat with her eyes bent on her lover's, with a prideful affection which the count could not mistake. He saw that she loved, with her heart's deepest passion, the man who kneeled at her feet. The lamp shed a soft, clear light upon her brow, and betrayed the loveliness of her features and the graceful proportions of her bust, which in the Cathedral her envious veil had half concealed from his gaze. What a fair, bright creature did he now look upon! how infinitely exceeding all that he had imagined! The glorious dark eyes filled with witchery; the ripe lip, eloquent with love; the beauty of her smile, and the thousand charms that, like young loves, made their home in the rich world of her beauty, transfixed him to the spot in silent wonder and admiration. Yet

there seemed to be mixed with his surprise, as he gazed, some painful memory, called up by her face, of which he in vain tried to fix the time, place, or event. But, baffled, he turned his attention upon the cavalier, who, in a low, fond tone, was talking to her, and vainly attempted to obtain a sight of his features, or catch the full sound of his voice. His attitude and presence there—his evidently accepted love, maddened him. The fair jewel of her love he regarded as his own! his passion had made it of all value to him, and he determined alone to share it.

"Knowest thou this cavalier, Rascas?" he whispered, hoarsely.

"No, signor; but every man's blood is red!" he replied, significantly.

"Nay, I would not shed it in an encounter like this; I must be secret in what I do."

"I will pledge my oath your excellency shall never see him again after he leaves this garden!" he answered, touching the handle of his stiletto.

"He shall not die, whoever he may be. He shall live to witness my triumph," replied the count, with fierceness.

"There are dungeons in the prison that communicate with the palace," insinuated Rascas.

"I understand thee. If thou hast thy steed in the street, mount him, ride after the troop, and return with ten horsemen. I will see that they are introduced by the private way through which I came in. Go! let thy horse outspeed the eagle!" Rascas promptly disappeared, and the count turned his attention to his victims.

Suddenly a nightingale from a tree near the lattice poured forth a flood of melody to the rising moon in so ravishing a strain, and with such a richness and variety of notes, that it seemed as if a whole choir of warblers were at their vespers. Don Henrique looked round with a delighted ear, and, as he did so, the Count of Osma started back with a surprised exclamation that had nearly betrayed his presence.

"This, then, is my rival! This is why he would keep private, that he might pass his hours in dalliance! Now, by the red rood! he shall rue this, were he heir to the throne! I did not think I should make such a prisoner when I bid Rascas go! It hath gone abroad that he lieth wounded to the death! It will be easy hence to bruit about his death from his wounds, and, if it should become needful to support it, I will not be backward in making it true. He shall exchange, within the hour, this luxurious boudoir for a dungeon, and this maiden's love for a jailer's companionship. Either he must be put out of the way, or I must give up my passion for this lovely being. An Osma hath never yet turned aside when love or ambition beckoned; and he will scarcely do so now! This is the secret of his retirement! It is love's arrow, I see, that hath wounded him. Soon, youthful wooer, I will take thy place; and if love may not win thee to love me, fair Azèlie, power shall do it. I will see this false quadroone-mother the while Rascas is away. Here, sir! lie there!" he said, to his hound, pointing first to the ground, and then directing his attention in at the window. "I would keep a guard here!"

The obedient dog lay down, and fixed his fiery eyes upon the young man with a settled and immoveable glance.

"'Tis well! If he comes forth, bring him to the earth, but harm him not!" he said, and the intelligent animal seemed also to understand. Then, returning to the quadroone-mother, he cried, sternly,

"False woman! didst thou not tell me thy daughter's heart was free?"

"Yes, signor," she answered, alarmed by his manner.

"Yet at this moment a cavalier is sitting unreprieved at her feet, and love is going on between them as busily as if they were married but yesterday."

Ninine uttered an exclamation of astonishment and

terror, and would have flown to her daughter's room, but the count detained her.

"Nay, calm thyself! I see thou knowest it not. Didst thou not take into thy house a wounded Spaniard last night?"

"Renault did. It is he that hath done this!"

"Be patient. This cavalier hath won the maiden's heart. I saw in every look and feature that she loves him!"

"Then this knife shall cut her image from his bosom," she cried, seizing a small stiletto that lay in its case upon a marble table near her.

"I command thee to be patient, woman. If it have gone no farther than this, I care not—nay, I like it well! This cavalier I have little good fellowship for, and would fain touch him in a point so sensitive. I have despatched my servant for a guard. Thou shalt hear no more of him."

"It is Renault hath done it, signor."

"If thou wouldst not do injury to thine own interests, breathe that accursed name no more," he said, between his shut teeth, his soul writhing at the remembrance of the young quadroon's insult in the banquet-chamber, as well as from his recollection of his disappointed vengeance against the councillors. "Thou didst admit me by a secret entrance. Send thy slave to wait there for the guard I expect."

The count paced the apartment in stern and silent thought, occasionally pausing at the window to listen for the alarm-growl of his bloodhound or the approach of his guard. At length he heard the sound of galloping horsemen, which the next moment ceased in the rear of the garden. Impatient to receive them, he hastened to the gate. They were already dismounted, and let in by the slave when he arrived. In a low tone, he gave a few brief orders to Rascas, who, followed by eight dragoons, silently advanced in the direction of the boudoir. The count himself, desirous of concealing his agency in the arrest, kept so far in the background, wrapped to the eyes in his cloak, as

to witness without sharing in the proceedings. With his characteristic tact, he had commanded Rascas to lead the dragoons into the shadow of a group of orange-trees beyond the range of the window, lest, either recognising who was to be their prisoner, they should be reluctant to seize him, or because he wished no one save himself to know the person of his victim. In pursuance of this plan, Rascas was to enter his boudoir, and induce him, by some duplicity, to walk forth into the garden, and into the snare set before him.

"I have told thee, fair Azèlie," said Don Henrique, in the hearing of those without, pursuing the conversation that had been interrupted by the song of the nightingale, "that my home is in sunny Spain; and that I have an elder brother, during whose life I am forbidden to marry, on penalty of being cast forth penniless. Such is the cruel law of inheritance in my family. Wouldst thou wed me poor?"

"Thou dost mock my love, Henrique!" she said, reprovingly. "Yet my love is so great that I would not have thee become poor for my sake."

"Wilt thou, then, lest my love for thee should make me poor, restore me my heart?"

"Nay, I am perplexed! Love would, and love would not! But I love thee, and would die for thee."

"Nay, thou shalt live for me; I will wed, and take thee with me to Spain. In some little nook, out of the world's way, will we pass our days, and be happy without wealth or name."

"Now that I know how much thou wilt risk by loving me, I shrink at what I bring upon thee."

"Nay, sweet, thou art all the world to me; wealth, honour, and rank are forgotten in loving thee! I look into thine eyes and am happy! I hear thy voice and am blessed! Thy smile is sunshine to my heart, and thy presence to me the purest earthly bliss!" He kissed the cheek she laid upon his shoulder, and was silent a moment; then added, with a smile, "I did not tell thee that my father, lest I should marry, would have made me a monk! And, to escape holy orders,

I took to the sea, a wanderer, and Heaven hither hath brought me to crown my happiness. Ha ! was not that a voice ?” he cried, starting up, and looking towards the door that led into the apartments of the quadroone-mother. “Nay, it was nothing,” he added, resuming his place. He had, indeed, heard a low growl from the hound, but the direction of the sound had deceived him.

“Why, Henrique, do you keep your eyes fixed so constantly on the door, disturbed by the rustling of a leaf ?” she asked, with alarm.

“Nay, dost thou not expect Renault soon ?” he inquired, evasively.

“And thou needest not fear Renault ; the knowledge of my happiness would be joy to him. He does indeed linger ! Whither could he have gone from the palace ?”

“Doubtless to look after the safety of the councilors whom he so nobly rescued. I pray they got safely beyond the bloody fangs of Osma. Nay, I surely heard a footstep approaching,” he said, placing himself in an attitude to receive an intruder.

“’Twas not within yonder room,” she said, with a smile ; “thou hast listened so towards that door, that thou dost imagine every noise to proceed from the point towards which thy ears are turned. It was but a rustling of the breeze in the foliage without. Pray tell me what hath moved this suspicion in thee ?”

“Listen—for thou must soon learn—but fear nothing on account of what I am to tell thee. Thy mother hath sent to confer with Count Osma, and he is now in her apartment—thyself the subject of their conference. Nay, dearest, am I not here to defend thee ? I have prepared a vessel to escape with thee to Spain, this hour to sail if thou wilt say yes ! Shortly my friends will be waiting in the street to receive us, and bear us on board. Wilt thou fly with me, dearest ?”

“My brother !”

“Thy *lover* !”

"Wherever thou goest, there will I go. But Renault—"

"Shall follow us. But the time will not now admit of delay."

"Wherefore, then, do we linger here? One moment may destroy both thyself and me. The Count Osma will soon seek my boudoir, and thou wilt be the first sacrifice!"

"I wait here that I may meet him. I would have him be a witness to our love!" he said, with a smile.

"He will slay thee!"

"He will scarce dare lift his weapon against me, Azèlie. And am I not armed?"

"Then blood will flow! Fly—fly—if not for *thy* safety, for *mine*—for I tremble at his wicked power!"

"Be it so, dearest! for thy fear's sake! But I had hoped to have met the tyrant here in thy virgin presence, and looked his villany down his throat! Yet I will go with thee; but first will I leave some record behind, that he may know who hath robbed him of his treasure."

"Mercy! we are lost—lost!" suddenly shrieked Azèlie.

The Count of Osma, not desiring to be known to Don Henrique as an actor in his arrest, had at first kept back in the shadow of the trees, intending to leave the conduct of the whole affair in the hands of Rascas, who, after posting the soldiers in ambush, had softly approached the window. But observing them, through the lighted casement, still in conversation, and fancying, by the motion of Don Henrique's lips, that his own name was mentioned, he felt a desire to listen. He immediately stepped forward, and, passing Rascas, with a sign for him to stay back, stood and concealed himself in the covert of the thickly-leaved vine that trellised the lattice, and, unobserved, overheard all that passed between them: what he said to her of his native country, of his intended flight, and, finally, his last words in reference to himself. The feelings with which he listened may be best imagined!

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But mostly shame and anger crimsoned his cheek that his guilty purpose should be known to his victim, whom he saw prepared not only to meet his rage, but to triumph over him.

"He shall not live to laugh at me, and make me the scorn of the Spanish *Cortez* !" he muttered to himself. "As he now knows that I am here in pursuit of this amour, I will throw off this disguise and all concealment, and, by the red rood ! he shall live to see his inamorata bless these arms !" Thus speaking, he dropped his cloak from his shoulders, and, stepping in through the window, presented himself before the eyes of Azèlie just as Don Henrique had pronounced the word "treasure."

"Of what treasure dost thou speak, fair signor ? Methinks I did hear this word," he said, in a sarcastic tone, leaning upon his naked sword, and eying him with mingled triumph and hatred.

"Thy knightly pastime at eavesdropping hath not been fruitless, Sir Garcia of Ramarez," ironically replied Don Henrique, unmoved by his sudden presence. Yet his eyes blazed with his feelings as he confronted him.

"I do congratulate thee, signor, on thy sudden health ! Thou hast had a skilful leech. Thy hurt had like to have cost the city its roofs, and some scores of bourgeois their heads ! 'Tis well thou art in condition again. Doubtless this trembler, who hangs upon thee as if a lion had come in her path, hath been thy surgeon. She hath made a wound in my heart this morning, which she must e'en make whole again, if such be her skill."

"Ramarez, thou hast given full license to thy tongue," said Don Henrique, with manifest surprise at his ironical words and haughty bearing. "If thou depart not as thou camest, our respective ranks shall not deter me from striking thee with my sword !"

"Love and rivalry make all men equal, fair signor," he said, in the same taunting tone. "If an eagle and a falcon pursue the same dove, the captive is to the bird of the strongest beak."

"Villain, defend thyself!" cried Don Henrique, throwing himself upon him with his drawn sword.

Osma was scarcely taken by surprise, though the assault was somewhat sudden, and received him with characteristic coolness and skill. For a few moments their swords flashed fire, so fierce and deadly was the brief encounter. The count had made one or two passes, at first, at the breast of his antagonist, and then, as if changing his purpose of attacking him, stood for the remainder of the conflict wholly on the defensive. Don Henrique saw this, and, on his part, instead of aiming at his life, sought only to disarm him. This, after one or two trials, he succeeded in doing, by dexterously changing his sword from his right to his left hand, and making a sudden counter-pass, the count's weapon flying from his grasp through the window into the garden. When Rascas saw this, he leaped through the casement, and with his dagger was about to strike the victor to the heart. But his master caught his hand and hurled him backward, crying,

"Hadst thou slain him, I would have laid thee dead at my feet. Go, pick up my sword! Thou hast the best of it, Signor Henrique. Thou art a skilful swordsman as well as thy sire. But, though victory hath sided with thee in war, it must side with me in love."

Don Henrique had remained haughtily and indignantly standing where he had disarmed his antagonist, with Az lie clinging to him in eloquent silence, looking first in the face of one and then of the other, as if watching the balance in which her fate was cast. She looked far lovelier than ever, and Osma drank in her beauty with intoxicating passion. Each moment his determination, which had begun to waver, to use violence towards Don Henrique, grew stronger, strengthened by the admiration of her charms, which, unless he removed him, he felt would be lost to him for ever.

"Count Osma of Ramarez," said Henrique, whose eyes flashed at his words, and whose blood boiled at his libertine glances towards the maiden, "I have borne thy intrusion hitherto! I command thee to leave me."

"If thou wilt resign to me thy place at this lovely creature's feet, I will obey thee—after that I have wooed a while."

"Demon ! I swear to thee, by the cross on my blade, I will not spare thy life if I cross it with thee once more ! Hath this distance from Spain made a traitor of thee ? Leave me, assassin !"

"Ha ! sayest thou !" he cried, fiercely.

"Signor," said Rascas, hastily returning to him with his sword, "one of the dragoons left with the horses hath given word that a company of thy soldiers, under command of Don Francisco de Loyola, are waiting not far off in the street."

"Ha ! I had forgotten ! Treason ? So, Signor Henrique ! thou hast been corrupting my troops. They are the friends, as I overheard, that were to conduct thee to thy ship, for they are abroad by no order of mine. Ho ! without there ! Seize this traitor !" he cried, with ill-concealed exultation at thus finding the shadow of a pretence to excuse him for doing what he had resolved to do at all hazards.

"Dost thou mean this ?" exclaimed Don Henrique, in the utmost surprise, seeing the window filled with dragoons, two or three of whom advanced within the room.

"I arrest thee as a traitor to Spain !" answered Osma, sternly. "Seize him, and drag him to the state prison !"

"How can *I* commit treason ?"

"That shall be tried by judges."

"Count Osma, this mockery hath gone full far !" answered Henrique, as if scarcely realizing the scene : "your jesting is ill timed, and methinks you should have chosen a fitter subject."

"None fitter than thyself. Why do ye hesitate ? Seize the traitor !" he cried to the dragoons.

One of the men and the bloodhound sprang upon him at the same instant. The man received Don Henrique's sword through his heart, while the fierce hound fell dead as he seized him by the throat, from a wound

dealt in the neck, given by the hand of Azèlie, who, with a stiletto, which she had long worn as the guardian of her honour, sprung between her lover and the savage animal. The death of his favourite enraged Osma to fury. For an instant Don Henrique stood like a lion at bay, and, with his reeking sword, menaced death to whomsoever should lay hands upon him. Again the Count of Osma called upon them to seize him; in vain the youth's skill! in vain his lion-like courage! in vain the sheltering bosom of Azèlie! Overpowered by numbers, he was secured and bound; while Osma seized the quadroone maiden, lest, in the phrensy of the moment, she should use upon her own person the weapon with which she had defended her lover.

"Nay, sweet," he said, confining her in his arms and wresting it from her, "he is but a traitor! and thou art too noble to give thy love basely. Bear him away, Battista," he cried to the lieutenant of the dragoons, "and see that he is placed in a secure chamber of the prison; for thy head will answer for it. Away with him!" Don Henrique struggled fearfully for his liberty; and when, at length, he saw Azèlie in Osma's grasp, he foamed at the mouth, and gnashed his teeth with mingled grief, rage, and vengeance. But all was vain. He was dragged violently away from her presence, but not without receiving a glance that assured him she would seek death by her own hand ere she proved false to him.

Alas! how much poignant misery is mingled with the cup of life! Unfortunate Henrique! Dragged from the presence of thy heart's idol to become the tenant of a gloomy dungeon, on a vain charge of treason, that thy rival may rob thee of thy love and honour. Borne away, too, leaving thy beloved Azèlie in the licentious arms of a libertine! Hapless lover! bear thy lot with patience, for thou shalt be speedily and wonderfully avenged!

Scarcely had the dragoons disappeared through the window, bearing away their prisoner and wounded

comrades from the garden by the way they had entered, when Osma despatched Rascas to Loyola with a message, as coming from Henrique himself, to say that his services would not be that night required, and that he might return to the barracks with his men; for he resolved to reserve till the morrow his punishment of that officer.

He was now left alone with Azèlie, who, released from his hold, stood a few paces from him, panting and breathing like a hunted fawn that has unexpectedly been stopped by a new foe. Not a tear escaped her—not a word—not a cry! Her bosom was too full of feelings for utterance! It would be difficult to analyze them! Grief, indignation, terror, despair, all crowded upon her heart, and threatened to crush it! Osma gazed upon her a few moments in silence; and, perceiving that this was no time to press his suit, he was about to call for her mother, when she appeared, full of the intensest alarm.

"I thank Heaven thou art safe, signor," she cried, on seeing him as she entered. "I heard the clash of arms as if in the eastern street, and hastened to the court gate, when the porter told me it was in the direction of Azèlie's chamber. Blood is upon the floor! The intruder hath been slain?"

"Thou wilt scarce hear of him again, signora," he said, quietly. "I was now about to call thee. Thou seest thy fair child is suddenly converted into a statue of passion and grief! I leave her in thy charge, and trust all to thy advice and authority! Thou wilt scarce regret thy change of lovers, fair Azèlie," he added, with a smile of irony. "By Heaven! she stands there like marble. See to her, signora!" he exclaimed, with a voice of alarm and wonder.

Azèlie's blood had suddenly rushed back upon her heart, and left her face indeed like marble, while every limb became rigid and fixed. She looked like life converted into stone! Her very breathing was stilled!

"It hath killed her!" shrieked her mother, taking her icy hand, and letting it fall again powerless at her side.

"I fear it hath!" repeated Osma, with emotion.

Suddenly a piercing and terrific shriek escaped from her breaking heart, and she fell at length upon the floor.

"That hath relieved her, signora! Tears will flow apace, and by the morning she will be calm. I leave her in thy charge, and remember that thy life will answer for her safety."

"Need I say to your excellency that I have no wish than that she shall be thine!"

"Be this thy mind, and thou shalt be rewarded to thy heart's wish," he said, wrapping his cloak about him. "I came not hither to-night to remove my prize, but to secure her. See that she have no communication with her brother Renault, and send me word on the instant of his return! Poor child! she sobs! Adieu, Ninine. Pray send thy slave to let me forth!"

Thus speaking, the Count of Osma left the boudoir of the hapless Azèlie, and, with his breast full of the passions which the last hour had awakened in it, departed from the garden, and secretly and swiftly regained his cabinet. In a quarter of an hour afterward De Loyola was the inmate of a dungeon, and the soldiers of his command under arrest for revolt.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PURSUIT AND CAPTURE.

WHEN Renault departed from the palace, after defeating the governor's purpose of assassination, he left his party and galloped alone towards his own dwelling, full of anxiety for the fate of Azèlie, for whom he feared every evil while she remained under the power of his cruel mother, or so long as the rumoured libertinism of the new governor could give her ambitious mind the faintest hope of personal aggrandizement by offering

him so lovely a victim. As he rode along, he resolved to remove her at once, not only from his mother's roof, but from the town, and become the personal protector of her happiness and honour.

She was dear to him for her affection and for her gentle beauty, and he felt that for her safety and welfare he would willingly sacrifice his own life. With these thoughts mingled apprehensions for the safety of the president and his friends, who, though safely without the precincts of the palace, were not yet beyond danger. The more he reflected upon the character of the governor, the more his solicitude for their escape increased ; so that, when he reached his own gate, instead of entering, he relieved his anxiety for the safety of his sister by inquiring of the old African porter after her welfare ; and, learning nothing that could alarm his fears, he spurred forward, and in a short time arrived at the private mansion of the president. He found him in the court with two others, ready to mount their horses, and delaying only for the arrival of the remainder of their friends from their respective homes. In a little while these arrived, each armed, like the president and his party, with a heavy sword at the side and pistols in their holsters.

"Gentlemen," said Renault, who was received by them with the warmest expressions of joy and gratitude, "this night's treachery should teach us caution. The Count of Osma has too much hatred and unsatisfied revenge in his bosom to let you escape without an effort to arrest your flight. He has been foiled, not defeated. I pray you, allow me to escort you with my small band a mile beyond the gates. Nay, I will not be said '*no* !' Remain here a few minutes, and I will return and ride with you to the barriers. It may not be you should go alone."

Leaving the house of the *Sieur d'Alembert*, Renault then rode rapidly towards the rendezvous, in the hopes of finding there the most of his band of reserve of forty men ; though with some doubts of it, as he had dismissed them to their private quarters on leaving the

palace. He galloped forward, however, with great speed; and, entering the echoing court among the ruins, traversed it to the extremity of the hall without finding a single loitering individual of his party.

"At the very moment each sword is worth its weight in ingots, they are dispersed. My bugle will scarce reach the ears of half a dozen. Yet six brave hearts were a bulwark before the venerable president's breast!"

Thus speaking, he wound his bugle loud and long, the notes sounding far and high in the still evening. Thrice he repeated the well-known signal of his band, to the surprise of the guards at the city gates, and the curious wonder of the soldiers in the distant barracks.

It was a bold step, and he felt it to be so; but it was a crisis that admitted of no hesitation. In a few moments afterward every street seemed to give out a horseman, who rode in the direction of the rendezvous; and in ten minutes Renault galloped forth at the head of thirty young men. The president and councillors were soon received into their midst, and the whole body moved at a rapid trot towards the gates.

"*Osma's justice!*" cried Renault, as they came thundering up to the guardhouse.

"Pass!" answered the captain of the guard, throwing wide the broad gates, and letting them forth into the country.

Their rear was barely beyond pistol-shot from the walls ere Sulem appeared at the post, and delivered to the captain of the guard the new countersign given him by Osma. It was "*The Quadroone!*" He had hardly gone before a troop, consisting of fifty mounted dragoons, spurring at full speed, came up to the barrier.

"*Ho! Barrucas!*" shouted their leader to the captain of the guard; "has a party of half a dozen old men passed through the gate to-night?"

"In the midst of a squadron of horse that went by just before you came, I saw several elderly men riding, surrounded by a guard of horsemen with drawn swords," answered the other; "but, though they gave the countersign, I was sure, before they had one third passed through, they were none of our troops."

"Forward, in pursuit," shouted the leader, waving his glittering sabre above his head, and dashing headlong through the gate. "Forward! forward!" rung along the line of cavalry from mouth to mouth, each soldier, in his momentary ardour, forgetting the strict discipline that enforces silence on men under command. Then, with waving plumes and thundering hoofs, the whole squadron swept through the gate like a tempest of iron.

Renault was not yet a quarter of a mile beyond the gates when he heard the sounds of pursuit, and his suspicions left him no room to doubt the cause. Riding up by the side of the president, he said,

"I fear me, venerable sir, your life will be once more exposed to peril. I pray you, ride forward with your friends at the top bent of your speed, and leave me to check the pursuit. My horse is fleetier than thine. Mount him, and give me yours. So that you are in safety, I am content."

"Nay, brave Renault, this may not be; keep thy horse, and I will remain here. I am an old man, but can nevertheless wield a sword to purpose."

"Sir President, pardon me, thy danger has put thirty young men in peril to save thee. Wilt thou, by remaining behind when escape is before thee, render that peril vain for yourselves? Ride, sir; ride, gentlemen, all! We will place ourselves between you and pursuit. In half an hour you will be safe within the fortress. Eight or ten of my young men shall accompany you."

"Be it so, since you so warmly urge it, my son," answered the *Sieur d'Alembert*; "but, as I live, I had rather die than expose thee to harm on this occasion."

"Fear me not, sir. Danger in these times is to me meat and drink. Do you ride on, in Heaven's name, and leave me to give a good account of these Spaniards."

"Be it as thou wilt, noble youth," said the president; "thou hast put thyself in the way of danger for us, and we were ungenerous not to obey thee. Let me

embrace thee! Doubtless they pursue *us* alone. If they find us not with you, you will scarce come to blows, and nothing evil may grow out of it. It is best, therefore, that we do ride on. Come, gentlemen, our absence will prevent bloodshed; let us spur forward."

Thus speaking, the councillors, guarded by five or six young men, separated from the escort, and with freer rein, though the whole company had hitherto rode at good speed, galloped ahead.

"Now, my brave *courreurs*," said Renault, having given orders to his troop to ride at a less rapid rate, "on our prudence and courage depend the lives of those venerable men. Yonder advancing troops are Spaniards, doubtless in pursuit of them. They cannot certainly know that they were of our party, and may be turned back from the chase peaceably. But if they will not be prevailed on to return, but are resolved to go on in pursuit, then it becomes us to give them battle. They are rapidly approaching! A furlong before us is a slight elevation in an open space of the forest. There we will draw rein and await them. On!"

In a few moments they came to the rising ground, and wheeled into line facing the town. They had hardly done so when the moonlight, flashing upon numerous glittering points in the distant forest-road, as well as the louder sound of galloping horses, jingling sabres, and ringing iron, showed them that those who pursued were immediately upon them.

"Coolly and silently, my comrades, now," said Renault; "their force can scarcely be twice our own, and, for brave and determined hearts like ours, this is but even battle. They see us now and draw rein. This shows Spanish caution."

The pursuing squadron, the same which Rascas ordered out, but which he had commanded to ride on without him, after overtaking and detaching from it the guard to arrest Don Henrique, on discovering Renault's troop posted in their path, suddenly drew up,

and their leader, riding forward a few paces, sounded a parley. It was answered by a note from the young *courreur* chief's bugle, and he, in turn, rode forward to meet him.

"Your servant, Signor Captain," said the Spaniard, with some show of courtesy. "I am in pursuit of a troop of rebel horse that but now left the city gates, escorting certain escaped state-prisoners. I should have suspected thy party; but I see their faces are turned city-ward, and discover in it none of those I seek."

"Save my party, no other horse have passed this way within the hour," said Renault.

"Thy party is that we seek, signor," said a gray-headed lieutenant, riding up. "This, Signor Captain, is the very leader of the party that rescued the councillors in the banquet-chamber. I was present when the men-at-arms entered, and now recognise him. It is this troop, and none other, that came through the gates. They doubtless have sent the prisoners ~~for~~ ward, and are drawn up to stay pursuit."

"Then, in the name of Santiago of Spain, let us charge through them!" cried the Spanish captain, with animation.

So vigorous was the onset, the Spanish horse having the advantage of full twenty yards' momentum, that the *courreurs du bois* were compelled to give way before it, and let them pass through without scarcely striking a blow. Chagrined and angry with himself for having suffered the Spaniard to take him thus at vantage, and fearing for the safety of the councillors, Renault instantly rallied his troop, in his turn pursuing the Spanish cavalry, and attacked them while in full career with the most desperate valour. He assailed them on either flank with such fatal obstinacy and address, that, before they had advanced a quarter of a mile, ten of the dragoons were unhorsed, and left weltering in their blood upon the road. His voice was heard above the loud tramp of the horses, inspiring and urging his men to avenge their dishonour. And

well did they obey him. Once he galloped to the van of the Spaniards, and in person attacked the Spanish leader, cheering his troop, and shouting for them to strive to gain the front.

This desperate flying conflict continued for nearly half a league, the hovering *courreurs* dealing death and wounds upon their foes, and they, by the command of their leader, who each moment expected to come up with the fugitive councillors, only acting on the defensive, and using their spurs rather than their swords. All at once Renault, who had fallen to the rear for the purpose of assembling his party to take advantage of a winding in the road to cross the forest and gain the van, heard a shout from the Spanish leader that betrayed the discovery of the pursued. He looked ahead, and his worst fears were confirmed by seeing them galloping along an open glade, upon which the moon shone brightly, fully exhibiting the small party to the eyes of the Spaniards.

"Now, my brave friends," he cried to his band, "let us defend and save our judges, or die with them. Follow me!"

The way was too narrow, as well as the speed at which the Spaniards rode too great, for him to pass them before they could come up with the fugitives. Therefore Renault, after giving the command, turned off to the right, followed by his whole troop save three or four that had fallen in the flying contest. Riding a little way at full speed through a natural avenue of the forest, he came to a narrow path which admitted but two abreast. This he entered, and, after galloping about five minutes, emerged suddenly into the great forest, ahead both of the pursuers and pursued. It was with joy that he saw the councillors had not yet passed by, though they were visible not a hundred yards off, approaching at a rapid pace, the dragoons close upon them, and the voice of their captain shouting upon them to surrender.

The appearance of Renault surprised the Spaniards, and, slackening their pace, they came to a halt. But

the absence of the party that had so annoyed his rear instantly accounted to him for this apparently fresh squadron, and he was about to give the order to charge them. But Renault, with whose party the fugitives had united, profiting by his former experience, and seeing his only safety was in fighting, anticipated him by leading his own men to the onset ere the Spaniards could get in motion. The meeting was terrific and most sanguinary. The president fought by the side of Renault ; and the councillors were seen everywhere the fight was thickest, dealing deadly blows.

The force of the Spaniards was far greater than that of the *courreurs du bois* ; and, after a severe conflict of ten minutes, the latter were ready to give way, half of their number already lying dead on the ground. Even when the battle waxed warmest, the Spanish leader did not forget the object he had in view ; and, notwithstanding their stout defence, the councillors, through his coolness and skill, were one after another made prisoner and carried to the rear. Thrice the president had been seized and borne from his saddle, and as many times had Renault, assisted by two or three of his party whom he summoned to his aid, rescued him from their hands.

"This determination to take me alive, Renault," said the president, "shows me that, if taken, I am reserved for a worse fate than can await me here. So I will die here, sword in hand."

"Nay, thou shalt escape with me!" said Renault. "My poor comrades!" he sighed ; "this has been a fatal night for them. Thy friends, sir, are all fallen or taken captive ! What do we battle for longer save for thyself ? Thy horse bleeds to death ! Mount mine and fly !"

"Alas ! that my worthless life should have caused so great bloodshed ! If my escape will end it, I will do as thou wilt !" answered the president, despondingly.

Renault wound a recall upon his bugle, and the remnant of his band gathered round him. Then,

mounting the president upon his own horse, and leaping upon another, he placed him between himself and one of his troop; and, ere the Spanish captain, whose force was very much diminished by the slain and the absence from the field of those necessary to guard the captives, could divine their intentions, they were in full speed of flight.

"Hold, signors! pursue them no farther! We have six of them captives, and we had best return with these ere we are attacked by a fresh troop, and risk the loss of them! for I am told these forests are filled with roving gentlemen of the blade, and we are in little condition to do battle again to-night. Mount and guard your prisoners, and then spur for the gates! If Osma give me not a colonelcy for this night's bloody work, he hath little appreciation of a cavalier's merits! Are you all to horse? Then forward!"

Obedient to his command, the Spanish troop, one third less in number than when they left the town, guarding between them the six venerable prisoners, weary, wounded, and bleeding, formed into marching column, and at a slower pace than they had come out, returned towards the city.

Count Osma was seated in his cabinet an hour after his return from the quadroone's dwelling, his satellites Rascas and the Moor closeted with him, both having fulfilled their respective missions, save, as has been seen, that Rascas, instead of continuing on with the dragoons as he had been ordered to do, transferred his services more immediately to his master's person. He was waiting impatiently for news from those who had been despatched to intercept the flight of the councillors. Suddenly the sound of a body of horse reached his ears, and he started to his feet.

"Go, Rascas, and quick bring me their report!" he cried.

During his absence he paced his room with rapid and nervous strides, and half met him at the door when he returned.

"So! what tidings?"

"Taken," answered Rascas, laconically.

"All!"

"Six of them."

"Where is Captain Lopez?"

"Here, your excellency," replied the captain of the troop who had followed at the heels of the count's messenger.

"Yours are all returned, Signor Captain! Are these judges taken?"

"All save one; but with the loss of sixteen of our party."

"And but seven old men to oppose thee! How is this, sir?"

"They had an escort of some thirty *courreurs du bois*, I think they are called."

"Ha! this Renault once more!" cried Osma, in an angry tone of surprise. "One escaped, saidst thou? If thou hast the old president, they might all have fled."

"I know not their rank, signor," answered the captain; "every man of them is old and gray-headed."

"Conduct them hither."

In a few moments afterward the captive judges stood before him.

"You are welcome, gentlemen," said the count, with haughty scorn, as they were led in, guarded, one after another. "Ha! Signor Captain, are these the six? Are these all your captives?" he demanded, with keen and violent disappointment, as the last entered. "Where is the president?"

"If he be not here, it is he who has escaped," replied the Spanish captain.

"Then thy head shall answer for it! I had rather he were here in chains before me than a score of lesser men."

"It may not be helped, signor. We fought till I lost a third of my men. The one who escaped was wrested from us by the coolness and address of the *courreur chef*, who galloped off with him, his hand upon his rein, the remnant of his men circling him with their bodies."

"They have then escaped to their fortress, signor,"

said Rascas. "If you have not trouble ere many days from that quarter, I know not the mettle of this Rascas."

"I would give his head's weight in gold for it!"

"Give me the weight of his brains in silver and I will bring it thee, signor," answered Rascas, and significantly touching the haft of his dagger.

"We will talk of this anon. How now, Rascas!" he added, fixing his glance with stern vindictive eyes upon the captives, "do you not deserve death?"

"Not for doing our duty," replied the oldest of the judges, firmly.

"Nor shall Osma for doing his. Drag them away to prison, and send them a priest; for they die at sunrise!"

The count turned from them as he spoke, and they were led forth from his presence, without his bestowing upon them another glance.

"Ho, Sulem! go bid Lopez conduct them into the council chamber ere they be taken to prison, and summon the *cabildo* to me there forthwith. I had forgot. I have promised my daughter they shall have a trial."

In a quarter of an hour afterward, this tribunal of Osma's own creatures was assembled, the prisoners brought before it, and confronted with certain witnesses that were readily to be found. The charge made against them was that of rebellion. Rather for his own amusement than a desire for justice, Osma bade his assessor hear and record the testimony against the prisoners, and then called upon them for their defence.

The elder councillor pleaded that he had done nothing except in the character of commissary-general and ordonateur of the King of France in the province; and to him alone he was accountable for the motives that had directed his official conduct. This plea was sustained; but the Count of Osma, although the *cabildo* was a civil court, in his character as commanding general as well as president of the tribunal, likening it to a court-martial, said he disproved the judgment of the *cabildo*, and that the prisoner was guilty.

Another of the councillors boldly offered the same plea, which was in like manner disapproved by the commanding general. The other prisoners, seeing this, denied the jurisdiction of the tribunal before which they were arraigned. Their plea, however, was overruled, and they were convicted under an old statute, which denounces the punishment of death and confiscation of property, not only against those who excite any insurrection against the king or state, or take up arms under pretext of extending their liberty or rights, but against those who give them any assistance. Osma then rose up, and, after declaring that the *Sieur d'Alembert* and *Renault* the Quadroon were also included in their conviction, condemned them to be hanged, and pronounced the confiscation of their estates.

On hearing this, several of the better class of town's-people who had sided with Spain, as well as some of the Spanish officers (for the council-chamber was thrown open to the populace, and was nearly filled even at that late hour), sought, by the most earnest entreaties, to prevail on the governor, before he left the forum, to remit or suspend the execution of his sentence till the royal clemency could be implored. He was, however, inflexible and inexorable ; and the only indulgence he would condescend to grant was, that their punishment should be inflicted by shooting instead of hanging.

"So ! Take them to prison ! This farce hath been in play full long. Early to-morrow afternoon let them be led forth to execution !"

Thus speaking, the sanguinary governor strode from the council-chamber, where justice and humanity had been thus openly mocked, and the victims of his blood-thirsty vindictiveness were conducted to the dungeons prepared for them.

"On the ensuing morning," says *François Xavier Martin*, in his *History of Louisiana*, "the guards at every gate and port of the city were doubled, and orders were given not to allow anybody to enter it. All the troops were under arms, and paraded the streets,

or were placed in battle array along the *levée* and on the public square. Most of the inhabitants fled into the country. At six o'clock in the afternoon, the victims were led, under a strong guard, to the small square in front of the barracks, tied to stakes, and an explosion of musketry soon announced to the few inhabitants who remained in the city that their friends were no more. Posterity, the judge of men in power, will doom this act to public execration: an act which no necessity demanded and no policy justified; an act which served rather to gratify a spirit of retributive vengeance in the satisfaction of personal revenge than to answer the ends of national justice."

CHAPTER VII.

SCENE WITHIN THE ISLAND-FORTRESS.

THE sun was yet a quarter of an hour high on the afternoon of this murderous execution of the councillors, when a single horseman, in the uniform of a chasseur, issued at full gallop out of a forest two leagues from the town, and drew rein upon the shores of a wooded lake. His coal-black horse was whitened with foam, and his flanks reeking with blood, while the brow of the rider was flushed and stern. Matters of serious import evidently had caused him to take to saddle.

The shore on which he emerged was a shelving beach of white sand, that, like a snowy belt, girdled a small lake about one mile in width, and on every side shut in by noble forest-trees. In the centre of the lake, which lay, like a steel mirror, tinted with gold under the evening sun, was a small island, on which frowned the towers and battlements of a fortress, with the flag of France hoisted over that of Spain proudly waving above its ramparts. Wild ducks sailed in

troops about the lake, and the white gull skimmed its surface with arrowy wing ; the kingfisher seared mid-heaven, marking his finny prey with far-sighted vision as it swam deep beneath the surface ; while the eagle, balanced still higher, kept watch upon him in turn, ready to descend like a thunderbolt, and rob him of it when he should rise dripping from the flood. The whole scene was brilliant and touchingly beautiful, yet full of majestic repose, slumbering so quiet there in the lap of eternal forests.

Without pausing to bestow a glance upon the scenery, he had no sooner reined up, than, looking wistfully towards the fortress, he wound a horn that hung at his saddle-bow, sending the notes far across the water. After the lapse of a few seconds it was answered from the fortress, and a boat instantly put off from the island and approached the main. It was rowed by two oarsmen, and a third individual stood up in the stern. As it came near the shore, the horseman dismounted, tied his horse to a tree, and walked to the water's edge, as if too impatient to lose a moment in getting to the island.

"Ha, Rapin de Thoyras ! Is it thou ?" demanded the person in the boat, on coming near enough to the land to discern his features. "Cease rowing, my men ! Here is treachery !"

"Nay, Charleval," answered the other, stretching forth his hand frankly, and then placing it earnestly on his heart, "I am henceforth a *courreur du bois* ! Take me to your bosom again !"

"Nay, I did love thee as a brother once—love thee more than all our happy band of Seven ; now, alas ! disloyal and debased. But we will speak of this no more. Wherefore have you sounded our private signal ?"

"I would be conducted to the presence of your first chief."

"Renault hath been engaged in a sacred duty since the morning. Sieur d'Alembert lieth at the point of death, and he waits by his bed's head to receive his

latest breath. This is no time to intrude thyself upon him. I fear treachery from thee, De Thoyras. Wherefore shouldst thou see him?"

"They have slain my father!"

"Thy father! Who hath done it?"

"This Count Osma. Within this hour, my father, with five of the other judges, have been shot in the square."

"Sayest thou this on thy faith?"

"True as I stand here shedding hot tears of grief and vengeance."

"I believe thee! They shall be avenged!" said Charleval, with deep sorrow. "What wouldst thou do?"

"Avenge my father!" was the stern reply. "Every sword in our band shall be thine. To offer them to thee I have ridden hither."

"Take a seat beside me," he said, as the boat touched the shore; "our brave, noble councillors! Hath Osma done so bloody a thing? Then are his own days numbered! I will trust thee, De Thoyras, for grief hath made thee penitent. Nay, I will embrace thee, and give thee my confidence. Now know that a messenger, a swift Indian runner, hath been despatched to the Camanchee king, who has often pressed upon us his services, to come and aid us in driving out the Spanish troops, with a thousand of his warriors. He has a deadly hatred, it seems, for the Spaniards, and desires to meet them in battle. It will be ten days before they can reach us. One hundred of the noble Atchafalayas, with a fleet of pirogues, will waft them to this side of the river, while their horses swim beside the boats. In ten days, at the farthest, they will be here. We had intended only to drive out the Spaniards; but now, blood shall atone for blood, and that of Osma's heart must flow ere vengeance is appeased. Poor councillors! Savage and bloodthirsty tyrant!"

"The whole town are indignant and alarmed," said the chasseur; "this act has filled every bosom with terror. Men are flying to arms everywhere, and Re-

nault and thyself may lead full two thousand men against the city."

"Doth thy chief, Caronde, know this? and if he does, will he not side with this guilty governor?"

"He lies suffering from shame and pain in our stronghold, and hath, in his rage, slain two of our party for mocking at his mutilated hand. This has enraged the whole band against him; and their affection hath ever been more for myself than for him."

"Will they obey you?"

"To a man!"

"And these Ladrones of the Lagoons, that are thy allies, some two hundred in number?" asked Charleval, as the boat moved swiftly across the lake.

"They will fight where the booty and pay is best. Caronde is become nearly penniless through his extravagances, and they will easily be persuaded to use their knives and carbines on this side."

"This I will leave to you, and also the conversion of Caronde's band."

In a few moments they reached the island, and the messenger was escorted into the fortress; which, as he passed along, he saw was filled with the adherents of Renault.

In a small room of the fortress, with rough stone walls, and a single aperture for a window, through which the sunlight shone in cheerfully, lay an old man upon a rude pallet. His thin, white hairs were scattered over his expansive forehead, which was pale, and, to the eye, cold like sculptured marble. His majestic features were of the hue of death, but on them patience in endurance struggled with suffering. It was the *Sieur d'Alembert*. He had received a mortal wound in the attack the night before, and death was fast fixing his seal upon his brow. Beside him stood a priest, in silent waiting for his departure, having administered to him the last sacraments of the church. Near his pillow stood Renault, full of grief; for he loved him as a father, and affection had bound him to his bedside since he first placed him there on reaching the

fortress after his escape with him. The venerable man had his fading eyes fixed upon the small spot of sky through the window, as if surveying the path along which his spirit was to take its upward flight. Reason was clear, and serene resignation sat upon his countenance.

"My son!" he said, faintly.

Renault pressed his hand, but could not speak.

"I have wearied you this day, my son. My time here will be but a few moments longer. I would ask a dying favour!"

"Speak, my father!"

"That you avenge not my death. Louis has seen fit to give our province to Spain; and Spain has done no more than take her right. Forgive your king, and suffer Spain! Disperse your band, and be a peaceful citizen. This world hath enough evils that come un-called; seek to live in peace in it with all men, even with thy enemies. If you would look upon human wars and ambition as they now appear to me, you would, so you could serve Heaven in conscience, scarce heed who ruled the different nations of the earth for the short time you lived upon it. Now promise me, Renault, my son, you will live peaceably under the Spanish rule, nor seek to avenge my death!"

Renault dropped the hand he had so long held, rose from the bedside, and hastily paced the room a few moments without replying, his bosom torn by conflicting emotions.

"My son," said the dying councillor, with a slight accent of reproof.

The voice instantly drew him to his pillow. "Forgive me, my more than father! Thy wish shall be granted!"

"Bless thee, bless thee! I shall go happier, feeling that I do not bequeath civil commotions to my unhappy country."

There was at this moment a low knock at the door, and Charleval then entered.

"How is it with the venerable judge?" he asked,

softly. "The rapid chisel of death hath sharpened his features."

"He will go with the sun," answered Renault. "What news bring you from the main land? Your countenance is troubled."

"The councillor will in a few moments rejoin his friends," was the evasive reply.

"What mean you?"

"They are dead!"

"How? Do I hear rightly?"

"Too well. The six councillors have been shot, by order of Osma, in the square."

"Then Osma dies!"

"Dead are they all?" said the dying judge, who had overheard and understood their words. "Then have they exchanged misery for happiness." With a triumphant lighting up of his countenance, he then half rose up in his bed, and cried,

"I come to thee, my friends! I come! Heaven receive my spirit!"

He fell back and expired.

"Another victim has gone to accuse Osma at the bar of Heaven!" cried Renault, with mingled grief and indignation. "Happy councillor! Heaven hath a great gain in our loss."

"He must be avenged!" said Charleval, sternly.

"Nay, I have sworn he shall not."

"But not to avenge the other councillors thou hast not sworn?"

"No; but the president looked at me as he expired, and I knew what his tongue would have spoken had not death taken away the power of speech. No, Charleval, we must not do it. To avenge them were to avenge him also. We must live either under this Spanish rule, or leave our native land for maternal France."

"Art thou in earnest, Renault?"

"The chamber of death is no place to trifle in, my friend. We must disband our adherents, or leave Spain in quiet possession of the province."

"Be it so, Renault," answered Charleval, grasping his hand; "but we will talk of this anon. Rapin de Thoyras is waiting to see thee," he added, quickly, hoping that his account of the sanguinary massacre might fire his friend's bosom, and lead him to forget his promise to the dying councillor.

The interview between De Thoyras and Renault, which grief did not permit him to grant for full two hours after the death of the councillor, was brief, and terminated with Renault's rejection of his offer of assistance.

"I pray thee, sir," he said to him, as he was about dismissing him, "use thy influence over thy band, and persuade them also to disperse. It is best the province should be settled in quiet, and we shall most show our love to our country by forwarding, all that lies in our power, the wishes of our departed father and councillor."

While he was yet speaking, a bugle was heard from the main, blown in a harsh, discordant key.

"That is Gobin, and none else," said Charleval, as the unskilful bugler continued to wind note after note.

"Despatch a boat for him," said Renault; "I fear worse tidings still. Didst thou learn aught of my sister, *Sieur de Thoyras*, while thou wert in the city?"

"Nothing touching her welfare."

"It may be she hath come to no harm. Now Heaven hath taken the spirit of my friend to itself, I must see to her safety."

In a little while Gobin, for the messenger was indeed he, was brought into the presence of Renault. His countenance was expressive of great alarm, and his limbs trembled.

"Gobin, I pray thee deliver speedily and briefly the message thou art charged with," said Renault, impatiently.

"Brother Spain ha' a shotted the councillors."

"Hath any harm come to Azèlie?"

"Not yet, gossip. I took service last night wi' brother Spain, but I was a drunk when I did't. I
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went to bed, and slept till six o'clock, when guns a-firing woke me up, and I looked out o' the window, and I see the six councillors lying dead, shotten through the heart, on the ground," he added, as if his mind was deeply impressed with the scene he had witnessed.

"We know it, Gobin; did this alone bring thee hither?"

"No, gossip. Soon as it was well dark, before the moon got up, I ran off from the palace, afraid cousin Spain would a-chop my head off, and was going to hide myself in your house, when a gray woman met me and gave me this note," he continued, fumbling in his vest; "and told me to bear it to you with the wind's speed. I dropped myself down the outside of the wall, and was coming a-foot, when I saw gossip Boviedo on a horse he had found running loose after the last night's battle. He swore he had won him by his valour; I bade him keep him by his valour; and, setting upon him, overset him like a cotton bale to the ground, robbed him of his bugle, jumped into the saddle, and am here wi' the first news o' the councillor's being shotted. The note will scarce give thee more sorry news, gossip Renault."

He delivered the note as he spoke. It contained but one line. Renault read it, and with a loud cry of misery and despair, fell forward, and would have quite fallen to the floor but for the sustaining arm of Charleval. He was for an instant in convulsions. By a strong effort of his mind, he, however, recovered himself, and once more glanced over the note.

"'Tis writ there in letters of fire. Blood alone can quench them. Ho! Charleval! sound the gathering cry of the band. De Thoyras, I will accept thy aid. To horse, and meet me an hour hence at the Pont-chartrain gate, with every man thou canst make follow thee. To arms and to horse!" he shouted, madly.

The chasseur lieutenant instantly took his departure, full of surprise at this sudden change in the temper of the *courreur chef*, and wondering at the cause that pro-

duced it, though gratified at the result. The fortress was at once in arms. In less than half an hour, a flotilla of horse-barges left the island, and steered for the main land ; while Renault, full of impatience, his brain burning with the fever of his mind, and incapable of enduring the slow progress of the barges, leaped from a rock into the lake, and swam on horseback before them to the land.

CHAPTER VIII.

OSMA AND THE QUADROONE-MOTHER.

THE Count of Osma had glutted his appetite for blood in that of the six councillors, and the vindictive demon within him, which demanded their lives, sated for the present with this sacrifice, slumbered ; but another was now awakened scarcely less devilish. This was the fiend of lawless passion. After the massacre, the streets were deserted save by the soldiery. A gloom like that of the tomb hung over the city, and no sounds but those from armed men met the ear. Osma was in his cabinet waiting for the twilight. It came, and, attended by the Moor Sulem, he sought the habitation of the Quadroone. He was admitted as before, and found Ninine alone.

"Where is my beautiful Azèlie ?" he asked, gayly, as he entered through the Venetian casement into the apartment.

"She sleeps, my lord," she answered, significantly.

"Thou hast given her the sleeping potion I sent hither by my slave ?"

"An hour ago."

"And she has slept ever since ?"

"Some twenty minutes, my lord."

"It is well done of thee. Lead me to her. I would

feed my love by banqueting on her beauty while she slumbers. Sleep hath a thousand charms unknown to waking life. Lead me on, I pray thee, signora."

The quadroone-mother rose, and led the way to the chamber of Azèlie. A small silver lamp, suspended above the couch, shed a soft lustre around. With one arm pillowing her cheek, her raven hair falling like a half-drawn veil about her, slept, like an infant, the pure object of Osma's passion. Her beauty struck him with increased surprise. He was awed by it, and a thought of his own daughter crossed his mind as he for a moment contemplated the virgin loveliness of the fair child before him. But these thoughts were by no means welcome, and he banished them, though not without an effort. He knelt beside her, took her soft, unconscious hand in his, and admiringly traced the azure veins that lined it. He watched the gentle rise and fall of her young bosom with desire, and impressed, with licentious lips, an impassioned kiss upon her maiden cheek. Still she slept on, Heaven alone the protector of her innocence.

"Signora, I knew not till now half the value of thy treasure! I will bear her privately to my palace while she sleeps. Ho, Sulem!"

The Moor, who had followed him like his shadow, stood before him, and made a profound reverence of submission to his will.

"Nay, my lord," said the quadroone-mother, quickly; "ere thou remove her to thine own roof, certain conditions must be complied with."

"Ha! a price?"

"Ten thousand crowns."

"Wouldst thou sell thy daughter like a slave, woman?"

"Nay, have not wedded brides a bridal portion?"

"The bride, but not the bride's mother."

"Thou seest Azèlie!" she said, artfully pointing to the slumbering girl, confident in the power of her singular beauty; "have I demanded too much?"

"No. Sulem! hie thee to my treasury, and forthwith bring the amount in told gold."

The slave departed, and, during his absence, Osma stood gazing upon the lovely sleeper in silence. As he gazed, an expression of singular thoughtfulness came upon his features, and, with growing surprise, he seemed to be tracing some fancied resemblance that disturbed him.

"How like is the shell-like curve of the pearly eyelid, and long jetty fringe that turns back from the cheek its shades!" he said, half aloud; "how like is the smile that lingers upon the mouth, and how very like the mouth itself! 'Tis a strange and wonderful resemblance that cometh upon me, feature by feature! Methinks I toyed with that dark hair eighteen years ago. Hath Heaven awakened this likeness to defeat my purpose? Hence—away, superstitious fears! Shall an idle memory, a fancied resemblance to the long-buried dead affright me?"

"What wouldst thou, signor?" asked the quadroone-mother, hearing him speak.

"Art thou listening? Nothing. Hath he not yet returned? Ha! Methinks there is a shadow in the window. Good Heavens! dost see that?"

The quadroone-mother flew to the casement as he spoke, and beheld a tall figure looking in upon her, with blazing eyeballs, and one finger lifted warningly and menacingly. Uttering a shriek of horror and mortal fear, she fell senseless upon the floor. When she came to herself a few moments afterward, she looked wildly about her, as if seeking the object of her terror.

"What means this fear, signora?" asked the count, concealing his own alarm at the sight of the sorceress, lest a confirmation of his terror might defeat his purpose, which had received a shock, but not a defeat, by the presence of one his experience told him was no messenger of good to him.

"Didst see it?" she gasped.

"What?"

"The—spirit—the Moor!"

"He has not returned?"

"Nay—a—a woman!"

"I have seen nothing but branches waving without in the night-breeze. Cease your alarm."

"Was it nothing, then, signor?"

"Nothing but an image of thy brain."

"Could it have been fancy? If the dead do appear, my lord, it should be at such a time as this!"

"Thou hast seen nothing that is not of this world. What didst thou fear?" he asked, seeing her calmer, desirous of learning something of the mysterious being who had before exercised such an influence over himself, as well as now over the quadroone-mother.

But she waved her hand, and signified her desire not to be questioned. In a few minutes afterward Sulem reappeared, and the gold was told down to the mother, who, at the sight of it, forgot her late terrors.

"Azèlie is then mine, signora?" asked Osma, approaching and kneeling on one knee at the couch of his victim, as Sulem counted the last piece into her hand.

"Thine, your excellency. But thou wilt have to keep her in a golden cage, for a young hawk will be hovering o'er thy palace roof to pounce upon the dove when once the keeper is away," she said, with a malicious feeling which was inherent in her, and would break out even to a benefactor, if it might be she could mingle poison in his cup of enjoyment. Osma she thought was too happy, and her heart was envious. So from its abundance she spake.

"How meanest thou?"

"That the son of the late Marquis Caronde hath long sought her—and that thou art his rival."

"Methinks I heard something of this from Rascas. He lieth ill at ease, signora, maimed and sore from disappointments and wounds."

"The hurt tiger is most ferocious. I warn thee! Besides, my lord, he hath a claim upon her as a master."

"Azèlie his slave! Doth he assert this?"

"He doth—listen! I was a slave, and the Marquis of Caronde purchased me and made me free, but for-

got to record my manumission on the provincial records ; and his son hath revived the question of bondage, and claims me as his slave, that he may possess the person of Azèlie."

"This is new. And, singular enough, the only law that I have not changed is that of slavery, which I have sanctioned, and proclaimed shall remain as heretofore."

"Caronde will claim thy mistress," she said, coolly. "He hath a restless and vengeful spirit, and will give thee no rest, my lord !"

"Wherefore dost thou press this upon my ears, woman ? Hast thou a purpose in't ?"

"*His death* !" she answered, fixing her eyes full upon his.

"Dost thou hate him ?"

"He hath wronged me. Doth a woman ever forgive a wrong ?"

"Wouldst thou have me slay him ? This seemeth to be what thou aimest at."

"Thou nor Azèlie may live while he lives."

"Nay, if I slay him, men will call it fear of a rival."

"Wilt thou brook that thy mistress should be publicly claimed by thy rival as his slave ?"

"No, woman."

"Then he who alone can claim her as such must cease to live."

"Thou hast deeply considered this matter. This Caronde, then, shall die ere the morrow's sunset."

"For this promise, see what I place in thy hands !" she said, with a smile of gratified revenge, taking from her bosom a small casket, and delivering it to him.

"What is this, signora ?" he asked, opening and drawing from it a small roll of parchment, to which was affixed the provincial seal.

"It is the instrument of my manumission ; a gift from the Marquis of Caronde to me after the birth of my son."

"Wherefore do you now place it in my hands ?"

"That the laws may not disturb your possession of Azèlie, whom this instrument makes your slave, and

that you may make use of it for your own ends if her haughty spirit should rise superior to the condition to which her birth has destined her."

"Thou art a deep and subtle woman. Thy sagacity shall not go unrewarded. Slave ! go to yonder escritoir, and draw briefly after this model a bill of manumission in the name of Signora Ninine. Thou shalt have it as an evidence that thou thyself art free, while this I retain, to attest, if need be, the bondage of thy daughter to herself !" he said to her, with a smile of triumphant power.

The Ethiopian secretary soon completed the instrument he had been commanded to draw up, and Osma, affixing to it his signature and seal of state, delivered it to her. Azèlie, the lovely victim of this diabolical scheme, still slept, under the influence of the potion the Count of Osma had sent to be administered to her, unconscious of the fate to which she had been consigned.

"Now, my gentle Hourì," said he, bending over her, and feasting his eyes upon her beauty, as a miser gazes upon a newly-gotten treasure, "thy charms shall bloom in a palace, and for thy beauty I will return thee honour. Sulem, the cloak !"

Receiving a large mantle from his slave, and folding it about her, he lifted her from the couch and placed her in the Moor's arms.

"Now, slave, see that thou bear her gently. If she waken by thy roughness, thy head shall answer it. Proceed ! Signora, adieu !"

Thus speaking, the licentious Spaniard, whom guilt had sunk to such a level as companionship with this wicked bondwoman, wrapped his cloak about him, and followed the Moor through the dark avenues of the garden towards the secret gate in the wall. As he passed through it, he thought he saw the same mysterious figure that had appeared at the window of the boudoir, gliding across from one path to another ; but, after stopping a while and not seeing it again, he fancied it was his own guilty imagination that offered

to his mind a picture which he was momentarily dreading would appear openly to his vision.

By the private postern that communicated with the banquet-room, the Moor re-entered the palace, closely followed by his master, and bore his sleeping burden without observation to a small but sumptuous apartment, richly and luxuriously furnished, that opened from the cabinet, and which, from appearances, had been prepared expressly for her reception.

"Place her upon that ottoman. Gently, slave. Dost thou think thou art letting down a bale of goods?" he demanded, as they entered unobserved this room.

The Moor obeyed; and then, drawing back a few paces, stood with his hands folded upon his breast. The count softly removed the mantle that enveloped her form, and dwelt upon the expressive face, to which the motion had given a slight colour, adding to her beauty. The position in which the slave placed her was, unintentionally, most graceful. She still slept profoundly, and with so faint a breathing that Osma, after watching her a few moments, turned to the Moor, and said with alarm,

"She sleeps soundly, Sulem, and, methinks, full long."

"Lalla Azèlie will wake when the nightingale first sings to the moon."

"When will that be, slave? the moon hath risen."

"When the moon hath been an hour up, the bird will sing her first song."

"'Twill be three quarters of an hour yet. This times with thy saying that her sleep would last but two hours. If thou hast overdrugged the potion, thine own cimeter shall serve to sever thy head from its shoulders."

"Sulem hath skill, and fears not the result," answered the Ethiopian, with confidence.

"Be it so," replied the count, with a menacing doubt. "Return with me into my cabinet. I will pass the intervening hour in preparing despatches."

With these words, after gazing a moment upon her,

during which some painful memory, awakened by a likeness, seemed to agitate him, he dropped the damask hangings before the entrance to the boudoir in which she reposed, and seated himself in his cabinet.

Drawing a sheet of paper before him, he seemed to be concentrating his thoughts to fix them upon the subject with which he was to fill it. But he had, within the few last days, passed through too many and varied scenes easily to command his ideas to flow into a given current. The scenes he had been an actor in rushed irresistibly and painfully upon his mind, and the images of the murdered councillors, with the contemplation of his own conduct in the present affair, were forced upon him by a conscience that seldom played the monitor in his bosom. He could not conceal from himself his deep criminality in every feature of the proceedings, whether against the judges, Don Henrique, or the lovely and innocent Azèlie. The more he reflected, the more bitter his censures against himself became; and when he thought of his own beautiful Estelle, whose image was mingled with that of Azèlie in his mind, he felt a shame and contrition that promised repentance of his purpose. The innocence and helplessness of Azèlie pleaded loudly for her; but that very loveliness, as well as her unprotected state, were only stronger arguments to his passion. Suddenly, too, the remembrance of her love for Don Henrique rushed like a torrent upon his senses, and filled him with resentment and vengeance against both. This reflection extinguished all the emotions of human tenderness and sympathy that had been kindled in his bosom towards her, and inspired him with the determination to make her the victim, as well of his hatred to Don Henrique and Renault as of his passion. Thus, though pity and honour pleaded for her, hatred and revenge pronounced her condemnation.

CHAPTER IX.

A VISIT TO THE DUNGEONS OF THE INQUISITION.

THE thought of Don Henrique seemed to inspire the Count of Osma with some suddenly-conceived resolution. He rose from his chair, and demanding of Sulem a bunch of heavy iron keys that he carried at his belt, bade him remain in the cabinet and guard the fair sleeper. Then, with a dark lantern in his hand, he left the room, and, going out into the marble passage, followed it until he came to a low door, scarcely visible within the panneling of the wall. This he opened by touching a spring, and entered a stairway narrow and dark.

Guided by the rays of his lantern, he descended to the bottom, and followed a winding, subterranean passage, that led in the direction of the city prison. On coming to its extremity, he opened with one of the keys a massive oaken door, heavily secured by iron bars and plates. It swung slowly on its hinges, and admitted him into a sort of hall, damp and dark, which was situated beneath the foundation of the prison. It was octagonal in shape, and on four sides were as many iron doors leading into cells. It was apparent that the dungeons were no part of the prison above, and that the only communication they had with upper earth was by the subterranean avenue through which he had come. He gazed about him upon the thick gloom, which his lamp could scarcely illumine, with a smile of malignancy.

"This is a pleasant abode for a lover so lately sighing at the feet of his mistress. The Fathers of the Inquisition are skilful in the construction of dungeons. Methinks these were on a plan invented by the arch-fiend himself. How fearful and awful is the silence! How oppressive the breathing! Yet Rascas must

have placed him deeper yet, for his instructions to me were, on arriving at the octagonal hall, to seek a trap-door and descend again ! This assassin hath the essence of cruelty in him. I should have been content to have placed him in one of these cells. If Rascas means treachery by sending me lower, I am well in his hands !”

“Satan seldom harms Satan,” said the voice of the assassin in his ear.

Osma’s blood rushed icy cold to his heart, and he started back several feet with undisguised alarm at the sudden surprise in such a place.

“Villain, is it thou ?” he demanded, instantly recovering himself.

“I was sleeping on my pallet when you passed me in the anteroom, and followed you lest you might not find your prisoner, my lord,” he said, unmoved.

“Thou hast thrust him into a foul dungeon ! Cruelty hath no medium with thee, villain.”

“Thou gavest me my first lesson in it, signor,” he answered, ironically.

“Thou art over free with thy speech, sirrah ! Show me to the dungeon !”

Rascas lifted a trap-door in an angle of the vaulted chamber, and there rushed upward a cold, dead atmosphere, that chilled the tyrant to the heart. He at first hesitated to descend ; but, recovering his resolution, bade Rascas go down before him, and then followed with cautious and suspicious steps. At the bottom of the stairs was a circular vault, with a low iron door opening into an inner dungeon. To this door Rascas applied one of the keys of the bunch held by the count, and, swinging heavily on its hinges, it exposed within a cell about eight feet square, dimly lighted by an iron lamp suspended from the moist and dripping roof. The sides, floor, and ceiling of this horrid dungeon were plated with iron, and its atmosphere was like that of the charnel-house. At his first step the foot of the count struck against something, the hollow sound of which filled him with horror. He

glanced on the pavement at his feet, and beheld a skull, and near it human bones fastened to chains bolted into the iron sides of the dungeon. He felt that he was, indeed, in the dungeons of the Inquisition, which had early established its dread power in that province. He saw before him the remains of victims of ecclesiastical cruelty. He was appalled, and would have retreated had he not already proceeded so far. Rascas took the lantern from his hand, and, entering the cell, approached an object lying in the corner. The lamp showed it to be a man.

"Is it he?" asked the count, hoarsely.

"Look for thyself, signor," answered the other, putting the lamp near his face.

It was Don Henrique. He was calmly sleeping upon the iron floor, as if on the couch of ease in the chamber of luxury. It was the repose of a good conscience; the rest of innocence! The Count of Osma had sought his dungeon to mock and exult over him; to lacerate his soul with recounting his triumph; to madden him, and then to destroy him! He expected to find him insane with grief. To see him sleeping, oblivious of all sorrow, was a dagger to his soul. He envied him his repose. He gazed upon him with surprise and wonder; for he could neither appreciate nor understand the virtue that o'ertops misfortune.

"Rascas, thou rank villain," he said, shuddering, and glancing around the place, "when I commanded thee to take him to prison, I did not bid thee place him in a tomb. This cold damp will eat into my bones."

"Ah! thou art speaking for thyself, signor," said Rascas, with a sarcastic laugh; "I did at first imagine thou wert feeling some compunction for thy rival."

"Rival? Thou hast said the word! Ho, Signor Don Henrique! thy sleep is sound," he cried, touching him with his foot.

The sleeper started to his feet awake and conscious, and, at a single glance, seemed to comprehend the meaning of what he saw.

"Tyrant and traitor," he cried, fixing his eyes upon
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him with fiery scorn and contempt, "dost thou come hither to torment me with thy presence?"

"Nay, good signor," replied the Count of Osma, not without embarrassment in his voice and bearing, "you do me wrong. I have sought thy prison to restore thee to light and freedom."

"False knight, thou liest! Thou darkest not, *after this*, let me breathe the air of Heaven, or behold the blessed light! My freedom were thy ruin, and thou well knowest it. I am prepared to die."

"I pray thee, signor, believe me. This moment follow me, and each footstep thou takest shall lead thee towards liberty."

"Lead on, and we will see what comes of this extraordinary clemency," replied Don Henrique, contemptuously. "Ha! I had forgot that thou hadst tethered me."

"Rascas, hast thou put this chain to his feet?" demanded Osma, sternly, yet secretly pleased at this security. "Unlock the chains instantly, sirrah. I pray thee bear witness, signor, that this was not done by my command."

"He who hath placed me in prison hath heavier guilt. Lead on!"

Rascas, not without surprise at the count's command to release his rival, freed him from his fetters; but, from his knowledge of the total depravity of his nature, he looked for a characteristic termination to his clemency. Arriving at the upper dungeon, the count, whispering to Rascas to guard vigilantly against the escape of the prisoner, followed by him, led the way along the subterraneous passage, and, ascending the private staircase, regained his cabinet.

"Now, Signor Don Henrique," he said, speaking in a tone that made the young Spaniard's heart shrink with an omen of mischief, "if thou wouldst learn wherefore I have sent for thee from prison, and wherefore I have kept thee there, follow me into this inner room. Sulem! Rascas! why linger ye behind?" he demanded, at the same time, with a look bidding them

stand ready to seize upon the prisoner if he should offer to escape.

He then raised the drapery from before the entrance to the inner chamber, and the unfortunate Don Henrique followed him into the apartment. The first object that met his eye was Azèlie, lying in gentle sleep upon the ottoman. He neither started nor spoke. He seemed to be paralyzed by the sight. With a steady, vacant, stony gaze, he stood on the spot in which he had become arrested by the sight of her, like a statue. Osma had his exulting eyes upon him from the moment he entered, that he might enjoy his anguish, and triumph in his misery! An effect so opposite to that he had anticipated surprised and vexed him; he saw that the shock had been too sudden; that, in trying to bring about too much, he had effected nothing, and defeated his own ends. It was too much for his victim's reason.

The miserable Henrique continued in this strange, horrid state for a few minutes, then broke into a peal of wild, nervous laughter, that terrified and appalled each one present, and fell upon the floor insensible. The Count of Osma felt that he had been most signally defeated in his unnatural scheme of cruelty; and, turning away with a curse upon his lips, bade his attendants lift him up and bear him back to his dungeon.

"He shall yet witness my triumph, and at a time when he shall feel it," he said, half aloud. "Bear him hence."

In the fall Don Henrique struck his forehead against the corner of the ottoman upon which Azèlie slept, and the blood, gushing freely from the wound, had the effect of partially restoring him to his senses before he was carried from the chamber. His eyes once more fell upon the object of his devoted love, and, breaking from the Moor, he was about to cast himself upon her bosom, when, suddenly drawing back as if he had been stung, he cried, bitterly,

"No, no, it may not be! she—*she is lost to me forever!* Fiend! that hast ruined so fair a temple—where art thou?" he cried, looking wildly about him.

"Here, signor! Dost thou not see how calmly she

sleeps?" tauntingly said the Count of Osma, re-entering from the cabinet at his voice. "Nay, thy struggles are vain! Thou wilt scarce break from the slave. Be calm; she how sweetly she slumbers on my couch! Such sleep could only follow a willingness to become a captive. There is no starting from fear! no sighing! Do you see tears on her cheek? is the cheek itself pale? is there sorrow in the face? Her continued and quiet repose—does it not show she feels that she slumbers securely?"

"Demon! thou hast had thy triumph! Lead me back to my cell, and send to me thy executioner," he answered, with the deepest despair and wo the human heart is capable of bearing without bursting.

"So thou feelest it! I am glad of it. Thou shouldst thank me for giving thee a sight of the object of thy love ere death shut her out from thee for ever! Nay, I see thou art impatient. Rascas! lead the prisoner to his cell. Away with him! In this matter, signor," he added, as the young man was carried past him, "I repay, not only thy rivalry, but certain passages of scorn and contempt from thee to me both in Spain and the Havanna. I have ever hated thee; and, now that secrets will be safe unless thou whisper them into Death's ear, I tell thee it is for thy virtues and thy ever-wakeful suspicion of my guilty life that I hate thee. Thou art a better man than I, and I love thee not for it. I speak freely, meaning to pay thee no flattery; for thou art as one already dead, and therefore am I careless of thy opinion."

"Hast thou well weighed the consequences to thyself, traitor, of my death?" asked Don Henrique, with a look of warning.

"All men know, or, rather, believe that you fell on the night of the occupation of the town sorely wounded, and that you now lie at death's door from the hurt. I have to-day taken care to circulate the rumour of your probable death on account of it. To-morrow it will be proclaimed, and your body laid in state with public mourning. Think you Osma will be suspected of striking the blow?"

"Thou hast well planned," said Henrique, unmoved.
"Bid thy slaves lead on."

"Nay, be not impatient. I shall address a letter of commiseration to thy sire. He will feel that a great responsibility is removed, and thank Heaven for taking thee out of a world where thy continuance might be productive of mischief, especially if thou wert to marry and beget sons—for sons of younger sons are Discord's grandchildren."

"Methinks, if my memory serves me, thou art a younger son, Sir Count; and by some foul deed, that hath rather been hinted at than spoken out, art now the head of thy house!"

Rascas cast a look of malicious pleasure at the count, who was for an instant confused, and took one or two turns across the apartment ere he replied, with a dark and lowering countenance,

"Thou hadst spoken thy death-warrant then, had I not already consigned thee to death! Ay, signor, I am a younger son! And if thou hadst had the bold and ambitious hand of Garcia Ramarez, thou wouldst now have been—"

"Villain! silence! lead me to death. Why do ye linger, slaves?"

"Wilt thou not take a parting look of the lady of thy love?" he asked, with a malicious smile.

"Incarnate fiend! Hath hell disgorged its chief, that I am thus tortured?"

"Thou dost think thy cup is full. It will hold one drop more. Thou goest to prison and to death so calmly, because thou believest she is lost to thee through dishonour. Thou wouldst scarce go so resignedly if I told thee the victim hath not yet been offered up."

"Monster, thou liest but to madden me, and imbitter death!"

"She is yet worthy, Don Henrique, of thy dying prayers and holy love! I tell thee this," he continued, with a smile of most triumphant malice, "to sweeten thy cup of death. Her sleep is artificial. Behold her

there ! See her unprotected state ! In the power of thy rival ! Worthy thee still, yet thou unable to possess her. Wilt thou die calmly *now* ? Wilt thou demand to be led to thy execution ? Signor Don Henrique, this is the happiest moment of my life. Hadst thou not rejected the offer of my daughter to thee in marriage, I had been less bitter with thee."

Don Henrique struggled between the Moor and Rascas, desperate with this moral torture he was doomed to endure, and in vain striving to reach his tormentor. But the ever-ready stiletto of Rascas was suspended above his bosom, and the iron grasp of the slave was irresistible. Osma enjoyed for a moment his misery, and bade them drag him away.

" Shall I do it now ? " asked Rascas, looking back at his master, and then directing his glance significantly to his stiletto.

" Not to-day ; I am not ready. Leave him in his dungeon. I would have him live to think. It were mercy, Rascas, to slay him now. "

The assassin returned him a satanic leer ; and, assisting the silent and sullen Moor, dragged, rather than conducted, the wretched young man forth from the cabinet.

Such was the present triumph of guilt over virtue ; the power of wickedness, and the fulness of revenge ! Alas ! what will limit the iniquity of a man's heart when he flings the rein to his passions, and rides whither they will ! Who hath not reason to rejoice in an overruling Providence, that wisely governs and directs the human will, and mercifully confines it within fixed bounds ; to be grateful that God, and not man, is the governor of the earth ; that he alone disposes all events ; and that nothing is done without His permission, who at a glance beholds both the causes and effects of all things.

Such were the reflections of Don Henrique after he was again left alone in his dungeon ; and, though human feelings bore his heart down to the ground, he sought to lift his soul heavenward on the wings of

faith, and, with Christian philosophy, bear his grief as coming from a higher power than that of the guilty instrument that immediately caused it, and therefore requiring his resignation and uncomplaining submission.

CHAPTER X.

THE PARAMOUR AND THE VICTIM.

DIFFERENT, indeed, were the reflections of the Count of Osma from those of Don Henrique. His sensations on the departure of his victim were those of gratification and sated cruelty. He contemplated the misery he had caused with exquisite sensations of pleasure.

"I would save him if I now dared," he at length said, after thinking over all that had just transpired; "but I have gone too far. My safety is secured only in his death. Yet I would save him in that I like not to answer for the blood that flows in veins like his. But he hath ever been an eyesore to me; I could never meet his clear, quiet eye that it did not seem to be reading my soul. This Rascas will do the deed, and the wound may be shown as that received in the affray. He *must* die, for his injuries may not be expiated save by laying my own head upon the block. It were a pity he should die for such slight offences; but I have gone too far to hope he will pardon and forget should I permit him to live. Were he other than he is, he should live; but now his life must save mine. Ha, my child! I have seen but little of you since yesternight. Wherefore do you visit me now?"

His manner was impatient, and his voice angry as he spoke, for the time of Azèlie's waking was at hand, and he was about to enter her apartment when Estelle appeared. She was pale and serious, and filial love struggled in her countenance with reproof and fear.

She approached, and, kneeling silently at his feet, kissed his hand. He felt a tear fall upon it as she did so, and, raising her to his breast, tenderly embraced her, while, with a smile of affectionate fondness, he said,

“What has disturbed thee, Lil?”

“A dream, as I fell asleep over my missal; and, waking with terror, I came to see that you lived.”

“Prithee what was thy affrighting dream?” he asked, playfully, though not without a slight feeling of superstition; “when I was in Morocco I learned the art of interpreting dreams. Tell it me.”

“Nay, now that you are here by me and in safety, ’tis nothing. Yet it deeply impresses me.”

“The dream—out with it!” he exclaimed, ill concealing the feverish interest he took in learning it.

“It was—forgive me, sir—but I dreamed,” she said, with a shudder, hiding her face, “that I saw thee beheaded on the king’s scaffold, and that the young king and his whole court were present to witness thy ignominious death! Thy head rolled from the platform to my feet, and I awoke with horror! Nay, look not so fearful, sir; ’twas but a dream! I have let it weigh upon my spirits foolishly. It has given thee pain, my father.”

“A young king, said you?” he said, placing his eyes upon her with searching and anxious inquiry.

“A young king; but not the Infante Don Carlos. I thought his face resembled—”

“Whose? Speak quickly.”

“The young cavalier, Don Henrique.”

“Ha, ha, ha! Then is the dream false!” he cried, with a wild, hollow-sounding laugh, while his countenance lighted up with malign satisfaction. “Go to, child; if such be thy dreams, dream on. Thou wilt scarce do harm by them. Wilt thou to thy chamber now? I have business, and would be alone. There is a kiss for thy dream. I pray thee bring me a pleasant-er one to-morrow. Why do you linger, child? There is a question on thy tongue.”

Estelle hesitated; but, seeing her father’s, impa-

tience, with blushing embarrassment said, "Have they taken the president of the council, sir?" But her manner showed that more was hidden beneath her question than she would have known.

"He hath escaped, and this rebel Renault as yet. A price is upon their heads, and they will soon be captured."

"I thank thee, Heaven," she said, impulsively, as if relieved of doubt and fear.

"This shows thy loyalty, girl," he said, approvingly, referring her ejaculation to the last clause of his speech. "This *courreur chef* is a lion in my path. Nothing but the loss of his head will restore peace to the province. He is already plotting and conspiring against the state. He hath the talent, genius, and military skill in him of another Frederic of Prussia. Go to thy chamber," he added, quickly, his ready ear detecting a slight noise within the boudoir. At the same instant a nightingale from the palace gardens broke forth into a strain of ravishing song.

Estelle listened an instant to the melody, and then, unsuspecting, obeyed him.

With her heart dwelling upon Renault, whose unintentional praises from her father's lips filled her with pride and pleasure, and whose image she had fondly cherished with all the devotion of first love, she sought her chamber, from which her startling dream had driven her to seek her father. To learn the fate of Renault, for which she trembled on hearing the condemnation and execution of the councillors ("by the *cabildo*," as it was told her), was also a motive, and a very strong one, that had induced her to leave her room and go to his cabinet.

At the moment the nightingale broke the silence of night by his shrilling notes, Azèlie opened her eyes, wholly free from sleep or drowsiness, and with all her faculties at command. Her first sensation was that of delicious refreshment. She lightly bounded to her feet as if she had awakened in her own chamber, and, catching a note of the bird's song as she rose, warbled

along with him, scarcely less sweetly than himself, for a moment as happy-hearted and cheerful as if oblivion of past sorrow had been mingled with the Moor's sleeping-draught. All at once the consciousness that she was not in her own room struck her. There seemed to be the same rich drapery and costly furniture—the same ottomans and tables—for Osma had taken her chamber as a pattern for this, the better to content her with her imprisonment ; but the apartment was larger than her own, and the little altar, with its silver lamp upon it, was not there. The clock of the Cathedral at the same instant tolled eight, so loud and near, that the dreadful suspicion which began to enter her mind, that she was in the tyrant Osma's palace, to which the Cathedral adjoined, nearly overpowered her. With a low, sharp cry of apprehension, she flew to the only window, and a single glance out upon the Place d'Armes before it confirmed her worst fears. Her situation and peril were instantly comprehended in their full extent.

"Now Heaven in mercy aid me!" she cried, clapping her hands and lifting up her eyes in tears to the Protector of the innocent, as, after a single trial, she found that the barricaded window mocked her feeble strength.

With the peril, her spirit and courage seemed to rise to meet it. She felt within her vesture for the stiletto she had carried there since she had become the victim of lawless persecution, and, with an exclamation of joy, laid her hand upon it. "Now hath Heaven answered my prayer!" she said, as she loosened it in her girdle, so that it would come freely at the touch.

Her eye, searching for an avenue of escape, now fell upon the curtain that was drawn across the entrance communicating with the governor's cabinet. She flew across the apartment, and was drawing it aside, when she heard a footstep close without. She started back with terror, and the next instant the Count of Osma was in her presence. Startled, but not surprised, to see her in this attitude, he would have approached her

with a smile, and soothing language upon his tongue. But she no sooner beheld him advancing than she retreated to the casement, saying, in a firm and collected tone,

"Stand there, my lord! Approach me a step nearer, and thou wilt embrace a corpse for thy mistress."

He gazed upon her spirited attitude, her dilated eye, and resolute mouth, as she stood before him with heightened beauty, and hesitated.

"Nay, gentle Azèlie, this loveliness was not bestowed upon thee for this! This haughty and indignant bearing truly becometh thee; but a lover liketh best to see his mistress tender and submissive. Prithee! now thou hast displayed thy spirit, drop that lofty look, and let me lay my deep and devoted passion at thy feet!"

"My Lord of Osma, this language ill becometh the lips of a parent, and the father of a daughter who hath the years of womanhood!"

"Words from lips so sweet can ne'er be bitter, lovely quadroone. The more thou speakest against me, the more thy prettily-moving lips and flashing eyes will fire my passion. Thine own weapons thy beauty will arm against thee."

"Hoary mocker! Thy speech ill suits gray locks and dignity like thine. Remember thou art a knight and a noble of Spain—governor of this province—a chief of an army! while I am a maiden of an outcast race—the child of bondage and infamy. I pray thee, by thy honour, tarnish not thy name, rank, and station, by the thought that is in thy bosom!"

He listened to her eloquent appeal to his feelings, but, save that her inspired beauty increased his desire to become its possessor, it had no effect upon him. She saw the nature of the impression she had made, and, as he advanced a step towards her, once more commanded him back in a tone that he instinctively obeyed.

"Will nothing turn thee from thy purpose but the destruction of the victim of thy guilty passion? How

will it sound in the halls of thy master's palace, that Count Garcia of Osma hath sold his honour for the love of a quadroone maid? hath dishonoured his gray hairs, and brought infamy upon his child? How will the proud Count of Osma love to hear his name coupled in a ballad with that of a slave, and sung at the street corners? Shame on thee, knight! Dismiss this passion, which can only end in thy disgrace and the tragic death of its object!"

"Maiden, thy scornful speech hath not the power over me that thy beauty hath. Did it fall from lips less sweet, I might listen to it. A curse from thy mouth were turned into a blessing, through the richness of the voice that conveyed it," he said, with a free gallantry and warmth of admiration that terrified her; while he made a step towards her as if he would terminate a scene, of the continuance of which he had already become impatient.

"Nay, my lord," she cried, in a voice so solemn and imploring in its eloquence, and in tones so full of pathos and entreaty, that he paused and listened without power to move; "nay, nay, my Lord of Osma, if there is no appeal to thy pride! none to thy honour—none to thy shame, let me plead to thy heart! Heaven surely hath given thee human emotions: a heart to feel—a bosom to be touched with sorrow! I implore thee by thy humanity—by thy hopes of a blessed immortality—by thy fear of judgment and dread of final retribution, to depart from me, and let me go free and innocent! By thy daughter's love to thee—by her beauty—by her virgin innocence, spare me! Drive me not to self-murder; for never shalt thou lay thy touch upon me living!"

As she spoke she drew her dagger from her bosom.

"Dost thou mean to do this, indeed, maiden?" he demanded, with surprise and alarm, for the first time really believing that she would lay hands upon herself, and fearing that thus she might escape him.

"The grave were preferable to thy licentious love, and death shall stand between me and dishonour!"

"Dishonour! A quadroone speak of dishonour! Thy beauty hath maddened thee, girl. What love so high as that I proffer thee wilt thou find? Not a maiden of thy race that would not esteem it her highest honour to be elevated to the station thou scornest. Thou hast played thy part well, and I give thee credit for it; now thou must end it. This boudoir is to be thy prison till thou art tamed; so thou wouldst best suffer thyself to be caught, pretty bird; for escape, there is none for thee." He advanced towards her as he spoke.

"Iron bars and locks cannot hold the released spirit, tyrant!" she cried, elevating her dagger, and deliberately aiming it at her breast.

Anticipating her intention from the enthusiasm of her voice, and the uplifted, prayerful eye, he sprang forward, and caught in his sleeve, in its descent, the glittering steel. With the other hand he was about to grasp her by the arm, when, uttering a cry of despair, she bounded away from him, and, reaching the curtain, fled through the door into the cabinet. Glancing around her with the rapid, searching gaze of a hunted doe, she discovered the only door that led from it. It was shut, but instantly yielded to her hand, and she darted through it, as Osma, burning with his discomfiture, entered the cabinet in pursuit, with the naked stiletto held menacingly in his grasp. Without looking behind, she fled through the anteroom, and, not observing that it contained a tall, shrouded figure, reached the marble passage.

Here, for an instant, she hesitated which way to fly; but her pursuer's voice, calling upon her to arrest her flight, gave her wings, and she took the way to the left, in the direction of a faint light shining into the passage from one of the state apartments that opened upon it. This light held out to her hopes of escape through the presence of others, and, running forward with breathless speed, she reached the half-open door as the Count of Osma appeared behind her in the passage. Without a moment's hesitation, she sought refuge through

this door, and found herself in a small antechamber, where two or three female slaves were sleeping upon mats. A door was on the opposite side ajar, which she flung open and bounded through. Before she was aware, she found herself in a softly-lighted chamber, where, by an open lattice, sat a youthful maiden with a lute in her hand, discoursing most sweet and plaintive music, while the cool wind just stirred her golden hair. Azèlie half arrested her flight at her presence, uttered a cry of wild joy, and cast herself imploringly at her feet.

"Save me, save me!"

Estelle started with surprise and wonder at the beautiful vision that had so suddenly appeared before her; but, ere her astonishment would permit her to inquire her danger, and ensure her the protection she sought, her father entered the chamber in pursuit. His presence and bearing, as well as her knowledge of his character, explained to her all that she would have asked. She instantly threw her arms about the lovely fugitive, and, warmly embracing her, said, in a low voice,

"Fear not! the presence of the daughter shall shield thee!"

Then, starting to her feet, she cried, while her whole person seemed instinct with the insult and dishonour she felt she had received at her father's hands, "Stand there, sir! This is holy ground! Innocence hath sought this altar, and the foot of the spoiler shall not desecrate it. Leave me, sir!"

Her eyes seemed bursting with the tears her indignation would not let her shed, while shame and bitter grief swelled her heart to breaking. She stood before him like an angel reproving a demon. Her guilty parent bent his head at her reproof, though his wrath kindled fiercely against her; while Azèlie, glancing with a fearful eye from father to daughter, still knelt, clinging to the robes of the maiden, and looking as if her soul hung upon the words of her lips. After surveying them both with feelings of mingled shame

and disappointment, he cried, in an authoritative tone of voice,

"To thy bed, girl! This is no matter for thy interference."

"When a father's honour is endangered, and the blush is brought into the daughter's cheek, love and duty command her intervention. Sir, thou hast forgotten thyself! This trembling child shall find a protector in me, and Heaven will forgive this rebellion against thy will. Go, sir, and forget thy intended wrong. By my filial love, sir, it shall never, by word or look, be brought again to thy remembrance. This gentle fugitive will also forgive thee; and, save in the condemning censure of thy own breast, the past will be as if it had never transpired."

The passions of the Count of Osma were too deeply seated to be moved by this filial appeal; and, much as he loved his child, and now admired her forbearance on such an occasion, he could not forgive her the disappointment nor this unpleasant exposure. He therefore, with reckless hardihood of manner, that showed he was not to be turned aside by any moral means from his purpose, answered,

"Since my accursed fortune has brought this thing before thee, girl, I shall not mince matters either with thyself or her. I am thy father, and my actions are not to be submitted to thy scrutiny. I alone am accountable for them. As you suspect, this young woman is the object of my passion."

"A passion that a daughter should never hear named by a father's lips," said Estelle, indignantly.

"Would you have me degrade honourable love, wench, by placing it upon a quadroone? Wouldst thou have a slave for thy stepdame?"

"A quadroone!" repeated the maiden, looking with surprise upon the dark, intelligent beauty of the young girl at her feet; "a quadroone, my father!"

"A daughter of the race of Ham. I will wed her if thou wilt," he said, ironically.

"If she then be of that race of which rumour hath

talked so much, then is thy crime the greater ! Oh, my father, how art thou fallen ! How hath the glory of the house of Osma become dim !”

“ A greater crime, girl, dost thou call it ? In her case there can be none. Is the Sultan of Orient guilty of crime for filling his harem with the houris of Circassia ? This is the destiny of the females of that land, and such is their only wedlock. And is there dishonour to them in it ? Ask the Circassian maid if she feels herself wronged in being taken from her mother’s roof to become the favourite of the sultan ? Will she answer yes ? So it is with the race of quadroones. Their destiny is the same with the maiden’s of the East, and they would laugh at thee, child, if thou shouldst ask them if they were degraded by the fulfilment of a fate which they have ever been taught to be the summit of happiness.”

“ If such be this trembling maiden’s feelings, why is she now a suppliant at my feet, sir ?”

“ She hath a passion for another, and hath taken some high notions that her surpassing beauty is worthy the recompense of marriage.”

“ And *thou*, sir, thou wouldst break her heart by tearing her from its hope, and destroy the virtue that hath elevated her above her race. Shame and dishonour upon thee, my father ! Oh, that I had been spared this degradation. I could sink into the earth with the burning shame that weighs upon my heart. I know not, indeed I know not, whether to hate thee, scorn thee, curse thee, or throw myself at thy feet, and with streaming tears implore thee to come to thy right mind, and forget as I will forgive.”

“ My purpose hath gone too far : concealment is now vain : the first emotion of shame hath passed by, and I will not now be defeated in my object.”

He made a step towards his victim as he spoke, as if he was about to seize upon and bear her off.

“ Thy daughter first !” she cried, placing her person between that of Azélie and his approach.

“ Wilt thou protect my slave ? She is my slave !”

"'Tis false," cried Azèlie.

"Thy mother hath surrendered to me her papers of manumission."

"Then death must free me."

"Fear not," said Estelle, resolutely.

"Nay, Estelle, wilt thou beard thy father!"

"Father! Darest thou remember that thou art a father?" she cried, with the accent of keen reproof.

"Thou shalt remember it to thy wo in a cell, a score of fathoms under ground, if thou thwart me, girl," he cried, with the desperate recklessness of a man bent on doing the evil that he contemplates, having now thrown aside all shame and remorse, all paternal delicacy and self-respect.

He laid one hand rudely upon her as he spoke, and with the other was dragging Azèlie away from her, when he felt a hand upon his throat like a grasp of iron. His hold upon the maiden convulsively relaxed, and he sunk upon one knee, his eyes forced from their sockets, and his whole frame nearly powerless. At the same instant Renault flew past him, and Azèlie, with a cry of joy, was clasped to his heart. The hold upon the count's throat was now released; the sorceress stood before him, and fixed upon his face eyes of deadly malignity and triumph! He stared upon her with terror, and, recovering with an effort the use of his speech, said, with tones in which superstitious fear had taken place of every other feeling,

"Fearful being! Dost thou appear again to torment me? This is not the day thou didst appoint to meet me. What evil cometh of thy presence now?"

"Wo to thee and joy to others, man of iniquity and blood! is ever where I come," she said, in a solemn voice; "I did hope that thou wouldst have let me remain out of thy sight until the day I promised thou shouldst see me again. But thy sins come fast and sudden, and it becomes me to watch lest thou do more than I would have thee. Beware! This is the second time of my coming. The third shall be the day of thy doom."

CHAPTER IX.

SCENE BETWEEN RENAULT AND OSMAN.

Thus speaking, the sorceress strode from him, and, kneeling reverently, kissed the hand of Azélie. Then, gazing into her eyes with singular tenderness, she unobserved slipped a small locket into her hand, and, with a pressure of silence and secrecy, rose, and at a slow pace, with her eyes fixed menacingly upon those of the count, stalked from the chamber. He followed her with his glance until she had disappeared, when the spell under which he had been bound was suddenly broken.

"Ho, my guards! Sulem! Rascas! Traitors and treason! Ho, without!" he shouted, drawing his sword and rushing on Renault, who still held his sister clasped in his arms. The young *courreur chef* immediately released her and drew his sword.

"Thou needst not call thy guards, my Lord of Osman," he said, catching the count's sword on his own blade.

"Traitor, hast thou made me prisoner in my own palace?" he cried, turning pale.

"Thou art free, and thy satellites are at the gate; but—"

"Yonder fearful woman, hath she done it?" he asked, dropping the point of his sword.

"I know not what she may have done, Signor Governor," he said, smiling at his fears; "but this I know, your guard did just now freely admit me and herself without question."

"Dost thou know thy head hath a price upon it?"

"I do, your excellency," he answered, calmly.

"And that thou art under condemnation of death, with the rebellious president of the provincial council?"

"I have heard this too ; but Heaven hath taken the venerable councillor from the power of thy bloody hand."

"Methinks thou art fearless to use such speech, as well as to stand thus alone in the palace of thy foe. Dost thou not fear my power and vengeance ?"

"I? No, no ; I have found Azélie safe ; she has told me she has escaped thy lust, and I have no other fear *now* !" he said, with a haughty smile, embracing the lovely girl, who continued from the first to hide her head trustingly in his bosom.

Osma surveyed his bold and ingenuous countenance for a few moments, as if undecided what face to put upon the affair. At length he addressed him with a totally changed bearing, caused by certain motives which it would be difficult, in such a man, accurately to determine.

"I have had wrong at thy hands," he said, "and yet am disposed to pardon it. Thou knowest that the councillors thou didst release were condemned in fair trial by the tribunal of the cabildo ?"

"I did hear so, my lord," said Renault, with a sarcastic smile.

"Therefore," continued Osma, without noticing, though keenly feeling it, "thou seest thou didst do me wrong in that matter. As governor of a newly-acquired province, believe me, I seek to make peace and render justice."

"Is it justice to steal a sister from a brother's roof? Is it justice to ruin innocence? Is it justice to wrong the unprotected? If it is thy desire to protect thy new subjects, why is thy first act of power exercised in wronging the defenceless?"

"There need be but few words between us," answered Osma, with singular patience ; "the destiny of quadroone maidens I need not remind thee of. I did but seek to elevate thy sister to—"

"A couch of dishonour, signor !"

"Was it ever called so before with a maiden of thy blood?"

"Thou hast reason for thy interrogation, signor; few of the daughters of our race do indeed feel their degradation."

"It is, therefore, to them none."

"If, then, their *not* feeling it is an evidence of their degradation, how much deeper must be their degradation when they do feel it! and who would consign one such to a fate so dishonourable?"

"Yet by your own laws this sense of virtue may not have its reward in marriage. It were better it were corrected in them than suffered to beget misery."

"This may be thy notion of virtue, Sir Count, but not mine. Heaven hath given my sister a virtuous and noble nature; and, as long as she has a brother to protect her honour, she shall be no man's leman," answered Renault, with indignant animation.

"Dost thou reverence the laws of thy province, Signor Renault?" asked the count, suddenly, and evidently with some significant purpose couched under his question.

"I do, signor—all, at least, that thy clemency has spared."

"Is there not a law that gives to the owner of a slave the right of property in that slave?"

"It is a law well known, signor."

"Oh, Renault, protect me, or I am lost," cried Azélie, clinging to him, at these words of the count, with wild alarm.

"Thou shalt come to no harm," firmly said Estelle, who, during the whole scene, had stood beside her with one hand clasping hers, ready to interpose her person between her father's sword and the life of Renault, who, with pain and bitterness, she now, for the first time, learned was descended of a race slavish and degraded. "Fear not; I will share thy fate, whatever it be," she whispered. Renault heard her, and fixed upon her a look of gratitude.

"This statute also decrees that the offspring of a slave-mother shall be the property of the owner of the mother. Is it not so?" he continued, with that tone of

malicious meaning that already had aroused the suspicions of Renault.

"Such is the law, signor," he said, with embarrassment; for he felt assured that the count meant in some way to judge him by his words.

"Then, as thou dost reverence the laws, thou wilt scarce withhold the master from his slave," he said, all the gathering and concentrated cruelty of his nature suddenly expressing itself in his dark countenance.

"How mean you, Sir Count?" demanded Renault, with a quick rush of hot blood to the brain.

"That thou and thy sister are my slaves!"

"Ha!" exclaimed the young quadroon, with a start of surprise and inquiry, holding Azèlie yet closer to his heart, while, with his drawn sword in his hand, he stood as if to protect her.

"Thy mother and thy mother's offspring are my bond-slaves. Dost thou weigh well the word? *Slaves!*"

"I demand the proof?" said Renault, after a moment's suffocating pause, under this bold and confident assertion of his foe.

"'Tis easy given. Thy mother was a Moorish slave, and your late governor, the Marquis of Caronde, became the purchaser, and, after, manumitted her."

"Well," cried Estelle, who listened with feverish eagerness, while Renault stood surveying the governor with a contemptuous look, that told his fearless soul laughed at his power, and scorned his base resort to establish it over Azèlie.

"The laws that this youth so much reverence require that there should be a record of this manumission made in the public registry, or that the original instrument should be there deposited. She is therefore a slave. Is not this the spirit of thy law?"

"Thou hast well interpreted it, Sir Count," answered Renault, while both Estelle and Azèlie turned pale with apprehension; "but thou hast not yet exhibited proofs of thy title to the slaves thou wouldst claim. The young Marquis of Caronde, my brother,

hath already advanced this claim, and that, too, for the same criminal end," he added, sternly.

"His claim is based only on the non-existence of the bill of manumission. No such having been registered or deposited in the provincial archives, he believes none exists, and so claims thy lovely sister as his slave."

"Thou hast well informed thyself on this matter, signor," said Renault, his scornful smile scarcely concealing the filial affection in his eyes.

"There is a rich treasure pending on it," answered Osmá, glancing at Azélie with a look that caused Renault to grasp more nervously the hilt of his sword; "now know that that bill of manumission exists, and was in thy mother's possession until this evening. It is now in *mine*!" he cried, with savage exultation, drawing from his bosom and holding out to view the parchment he had received from the quadroone-mother as the price of the young *chasseur* chief's death.

Azélie hid her face in her hands, and her young bosom heaved as if the heart were bursting through; but there was no shriek, no cry! her wo was without speech—too deep for language.

"Nay, nay, sweetest, this shall not come upon thee—it *shall not*!" said Renault, soothingly.

Estelle looked upon her father with a face in the expression of which was mingled wonder and disgust, scorn and grief. But there was no fear, no terror there! Her eyes shot like lightning; her lips seemed on fire with the words that rushed to them, but could not escape; her whole frame was pulsating with the emotion that threatened to rend it. Thrice she essayed to give utterance to her feelings; to pour upon her father's head curses, and tears, and infamy. Her utterance totally failed her; and thus she stood, leaning slightly forward towards him, looking to him so fearful, so awful! as if Heaven had written its own judgment upon her forehead, touched her lips with the burning coal of indignant justice, and lighted in her eyes the intense fires of its consuming vengeance.

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He gazed upon her with fear and trembling. The parchment dropped from his hands ; and, involuntarily stretching forth his arms towards her, with a look so humble, so remorseful, that, overcome at seeing him, whom, notwithstanding his errors, she loved with singular attachment, becoming a suppliant to her, she suddenly cried out, "Oh, my father ! Heaven, not thy child, should judge thee ;" and, running forward and throwing herself upon his neck, she burst into tears.

What a wonderful thing is human nature ! How mysterious the workings of the heart ! It is a compass with a thousand needles, and no fixed polar point. It will never do to steer by, while affection applies the magnet ; for, to which ever side it is offered, there gather the needles of its thousand feelings, and she magnetizes all ! Estelle believed her father's conduct had hardened her heart against him for ever. She had desired to love him no more. But she knew not the strength of natural affection, and that the chords that bind the heart of a child to a parent are hardly severed. She wept a moment on his shoulder, and he smiled inwardly at the victory he had achieved ; so sudden was the transition on his part from the feelings that had produced this change in her to triumph. He now felt, because he knew not that the existence of filial love did not necessarily involve approbation of parental guilt, that he had gained her to his views, or, at the least, that she would oppose him no farther. He released her from his embrace with a kiss, and stooped to pick up the parchment, of which Renault had not made a motion to possess himself. Estelle thought her father was changed in his purpose, and, approaching Renault, said quickly,

"I pray thee, signor, depart now with thy gentle sister. In quieter times I will seek her friendship."

"Sweet lady," said Renault, "I feel my sister will ever find in thee both a protector and a friend. My Lord Count, is it thy pleasure I should depart with my sister ?" he said, fixing his doubtful gaze on the governor, who had heard his daughter's words.

"This parchment makes me the holder of both your destinies," he said, with the look of a man who loves cruelty for itself, and felt that the exercise of it was now in his power; "you are my slaves, and will henceforward be at the pleasure of my will."

"The possession of that parchment, Sir Count, can give you no right over our liberties."

"Thy mother hath conveyed it to me. While she held it, her liberty, with thine also, was vested in herself. She had the power to retain or transfer it. She has transferred it to me. It being in my hands is therefore evidence that I hold the power to establish your freedom by placing it in the archives, or perpetuate your bondage by destroying it."

"In that case I should be under bondage, not to thee, but to Jules Caronde," he answered, with firmness.

"But if this Jules Caronde hath ceased to live?" asked Osma, with a look of exultation he scarcely strove to conceal.

"Then God, not thyself, tyrant, shall be our master," answered Renault, feeling now assured that the fate of his sister was sealed, and that there was no escape for her but through his own daring.

"Then call upon Heaven to aid thee!" shouted Osma, in a fierce tone, attacking him with his sword with a degree of fury that exposed Renault to imminent death, trammelled as he was by the embracing arms of his sister.

He nevertheless parried several blows with extraordinary skill and self-possession, and kept him at bay till Estelle, springing forward, caught her father's sword-arm, and clung to it, so that he was unable to use it, and in the act exposed his bosom to the point of Renault's blade. But he forbore, for the sake of her who had found such favour in his heart, to take advantage of his adversary, and turned the point of his weapon to the ground. At this instant, drawn thither by the clash of steel, Rascas made his appearance.

"Where hast thou been, villain, when thy presence was worth thy foul life?" demanded Osma, flinging his daughter from him,

"Giving the last holy consolation to thy prisoner," he said, with a laugh that chilled the current in the veins of Estelle, whose eyes were fixed upon him with inquiring surprise as he entered.

"Hast thou dared to—"

"Nay, signor, he is well as yet. I have been but comforting him with a picture of the pleasantness of death when it is given by a true and steady hand, the steel being sharp and three-edged. I did comfort him with the thought that he would have an executioner that knew his art, and could hit the large artery of a man's heart in the dark."

"Thou art a demon! Wherefore lingers the Moor?"

"He left me in the upper dungeon to return to thee. Methinks I heard steel ringing. Shall I strike him down for thee?" he asked, waving the stiletto slowly before his eyes, as if measuring the distance he should leap to reach the heart of the young quadron, plainly understanding the whole scene.

"Thou art too ready for blood, nor hast more conscience in shedding it than a wolf. Use thy weapon only if he resists. Slave," added the count, sternly, addressing Renault, "deliver up thy weapon and submit. Thou seest odds are against thee."

"Were the whole phalanx of thy myrmidons drawn up to oppose me, they should not stay my path," he cried. Then looking fervently upward and saying, "Protector of the innocent, nerve my arm!" he clasped Azèlie in one arm, waved his sword in a wide sweep above his head, and shouting, in a loud voice, "*Stand aside!*" bounded with her towards the door.

Before the count or the assassin could recover from their surprise, he was through it, and flying along the passage towards the banquet-room. Estelle caught her father by the neck to prevent him from pursuing them; but he cast her violently to the floor and flew after them, preceded already by Rascas with his uplifted dagger.

"Harm not the maiden, but strike thy steel into the slave's heart if thou reach him," he shouted, as Rascas,

almost at the same instant with the fugitives, passed through the door of the inner banquet-chamber.

Renault cleared this room at a bound, and placed his hand upon the spring of the private postern. It refused to yield to his touch, for Osma had that morning replaced it by another, the secret of which was known only to himself. He uttered a cry of despair, not for his own danger, but, alas ! for that of one dearer to him than his own life. He turned round just in time to shiver in pieces the stiletto which was impetuously, and with deadly aim, levelled at his heart, and with the same thrust buried his sword to the hilt in the body of Rascas. With an execration in language most fearful and appalling, the assassin staggered backward and fell at the feet of his master.

"What hast thou done, slave ?" demanded Osma, appalled at seeing this.

"Rid the world of a monster," answered Renault, menacing his surviving pursuer with his reeking sword. "Approach thou another step, and even thy daughter, whose shrieks now ring through the palace, shall not save thee. I am a desperate man, Sir Count, and calm and collected as I am desperate. Beware how thou bringest upon my head thy blood !"

The Count of Osma stood before him trembling with rage and vengeance, when the sound of advancing feet, as of armed men hastening along the paved passage, reached his ear. Renault also heard it, and, bending his face over the colourless cheek of his sister, he whispered a few words in her ear, to which she replied by a look of heavenly resignation, though with a slight shudder in her whole frame. The sound approached, and the next instant the entrance was filled with men-at-arms, and Osma's features lighted up with the most intense and savage joy. Pointing to Renault, he cried,

"Ye could come at the shrieks of a wench, but are deaf to the voice of your chief. Seize him, and bind him hand and foot ! Slave !" he added, triumphantly, "now is thy sister mine."

"Tyrant, she is Heaven's !" he answered, sublimely, elevating his sword, and calmly directing the point of it towards her bosom.

"Hold, rash youth !" cried a voice that made even the soldiers give back, as they were advancing to obey their chief.

It arrested his sword as it was suspended above her heart. At the same instant the sorceress stood in the midst.

"Lay not thy hand upon her, Renault ; she is under Heaven's protection, and will come to no harm."

Then advancing through the men-at-arms, who gave way before her, and putting authoritatively aside the sacrificing weapon of the brother, she knelt and kissed reverently, as before, the hand of Azèlie, who suddenly felt towards her a degree of confidence and trust that she could not account for. The mysterious woman then turned towards the Count of Osma, who, though startled by her appearance, was much less moved than he had been hitherto, and seemed to regard her intrusion with impatience rather than personal apprehension. She seemed not to notice this ; but, coming near, and standing full before him, said, while her glittering glance made his own menacing gaze quail,

"Garcia of Osma, what wouldst thou, that I see thee thus with a drawn sword in thy hand, lust and anger in thine eyes, and vengeance, like a cloud, darkening thy brow ! armed men at thy back, and a wounded man at thy feet ?"

"Hence, woman ! I defy thee. I know thee not. Thou art an impostor, that by accident hath discovered the key to my conscience, and hast used it for thine own ends. Hence ! *Thou* shalt never stand between me and my pleasure. Depart in peace ! Dare to linger here a moment longer, I will bid my soldiers seize thee, and have thee burned at the stake."

"Ha, ha ! Garcia Ramarez ! Thou fearest me not ! Thou knowest me not ! Hast thou forgotten already the evidences of the power I have over thy soul, shown thee in thy tent ?"

"Avaunt, fiend !" he cried, the recollection suddenly returning upon him with painful horror.

"Nay, I will show thee that I have still the bondage of thy soul. Hear ! Hast thou forgotten the name of Zillah ? or the olive bower of the private gardens of Asmil ?"

"Who art thou, in the name of all good and holy spirits ?" he exclaimed, recoiling from her with infinitely more dread than he had yet exhibited in her presence.

"I am thy evil spirit, and the protector of the maiden thou pursuest with thy unholy passion. Know that I have watched over her from the hour thou first beheld her ; have been near her in her greatest peril ; but have permitted thee to do what thou hast hitherto done, that thy condemnation may be the heavier. Thou hast had no power to injure her, for my instant presence, with the hold I have upon thy spirit, would ever have struck thee powerless."

"Wherefore, then, hast thou permitted her to be pursued even to the death, if thou art what thou sayest ? Thy hand could not have stayed the dagger that was directed by her own hand to her own heart ! Thy speech betrays itself."

"That dagger is in thy own possession. Let me see it !" she asked, with a scornful smile.

She took from him the delicate weapon that he had wrested from Azèlie, and fearlessly struck it against her own breast. She raised her hand again, and showed the blade of the stiletto was sheathed in the handle, and that the blow with it had been harmless.

"How came she by that weapon ? There never was but one like that—"

"And thou didst leave that one in the gardens of Asmil ! And I found it this evening upon her toilet ere thou didst go to steal her away, and, loosening the secret spring, replaced it."

"She knew not of it, then ?"

"No ; but looked upon the false weapon as her trusty friend. I foresaw what would follow ! I knew

all thy plans ! I was familiar with all the schemes of thy soul ! I saw you bear her away under the cover of darkness, and knew the danger she would be subject to ; yet left her not wholly to thy power. For I did desire thee, for reasons thou wilt soon learn, to carry out thy wickedness to its top vent, and also to test her own virtue and resolution. It was for this I left her to thee in this recent peril, having the power to help and prevent. Now, Garcia of Osma, the time approaches for thy judgment ! Thy wickedness hath nearly its fulness ! The day, in hope for which I have passed sleepless nights and weary days, lest mischief should, meanwhile, befall this gentle maiden, is near at hand."

"What meanest thou ?" he asked, impressed by the solemnity and warning tones of her voice.

"On *that day* my meaning shall be written in thy soul in letters of fire. Thou claimest this maiden ?" she then said, quickly and abruptly ; "methinks thou claimest this maiden as thy slave ?"

"By the laws of the land she is my bondwoman ! She and her haughty brother are my slaves !" answered Osma, aroused to a sense of his present interests by her sudden question, and losing, under the returning influence of it, his emotions of surprise and awe.

"Be it so. Yet, by the same laws, an individual declared to be a slave has a privilege of demanding a trial, and, before the highest tribunal of the land, to challenge the accuser to prove his claim. Is not this the statute ?"

"It is," he answered, hesitating, and with a look that betrayed his suspicion of her aim.

"Count of Osma," she said, addressing him with commanding severity, "though thou fearest not Heaven nor regardest man, yet thou hast a guilty conscience within that makes thee tremble. To this conscience I hold the key ! By thy fear of *me* and dread of my power, I command thee to let thy claim to this maiden be tried before the public tribunal. If she be

proved to be thy slave, take her; if she be proved to be free, let her go free. Challenge trial, maiden!"

"Oh no, no!" shrieked Azèlie, in whose heart hope had sprung up while the sorceress was speaking; "never, never! Let me die! Oh, my brother, slay me with thine own hand!"

Renault, who had also indulged hopes of his sister's escape through her, now gazed upon this extraordinary woman with indignation, and cried out fiercely,

"Who art thou, that triflest with the liberty of a maiden? Thy words were but now awakening confidence in her breast, only to be followed by deeper despair. If this tyrant Osma, whom this proposal seems to gratify, is to be our judge, let the sentence here be given, and the spirit of this helpless child at once be released to a better world."

"Osma sits not as judge where he is to stand as accuser," answered the sorceress.

"Then I consent not to it," replied the count, quickly.

"Thou dardest not refuse. It is my command," she said, authoritatively.

"Be it as thou wilt; 'twill defer my triumph but a few hours. The council shall be summoned forthwith. By the rood! this challenge of trial suits my humour."

"Summon thy council, but summon them from the seventh day from this," she said, sternly. "It is the Christian feast of St. Michael and All Angels."

"Wilt thou madden me?" he cried, between rage and fear at the words.

"Obey!" she responded, solemnly.

"I will, wonderful woman!"

"I then challenge thee, in the name of Renault and Azèlie, who are called quadroons, and declared by thee to be thy slaves, to prove thy claim in open tribunal, or ever after hold thy peace! Dost thou accept the challenge?"

"I do," he answered, knowing not that he was here in sealing his own doom.

"Therefore, until the day of trial, let them both remain prisoners in their own dwelling, with such a

guard about it to secure their appearance as thy fears shall lead thee to place," she said, with singular authority.

The Count of Osma, whose mind seemed to be directed by an irresistible fatuity, after a brief hesitation answered,

"It shall be done. Let there be detached a guard of twenty faithful men-at-arms," he said, addressing the officer who commanded the soldiers present, "to escort these prisoners to their own house. See that they are strictly guarded; for every head among you shall answer for their forthcoming on the day of trial! Now, Lil," he said, changing his manner with that readiness characteristic of him, playfully addressing his daughter, who had followed the soldiers her shrieks had brought into the banquet-room, and who all the while had stood beside her father, listening with the deepest sympathy and interest to the progress of the fate of the unfortunate quadroons; "now, my Lil, you will give me credit for forbearance and leniency. Thou seest that in the matter of the rebellious counsellors, I did as thou didst desire; and that I condescend, with the proofs of their bondage in my hands, that the accused here present shall have fair and honourable trial."

Estelle faintly smiled and shook her head; then approaching Azèlie, to whom all seemed like a dreadful dream, assured her of her protection, and soothed her with the confident assurance of her ultimate happiness. Poor Azèlie! besides her own fate, she wept for that of Henrique! The uncertainty that hung over him was more dreadful for her to endure than her own present misery. The trial held out to her no hope; and even acquittal she felt would be wretchedness, if Don Henrique was lost to her for ever. Estelle knew not all the wo of her young heart, and could not comfort her. Looking timidly up into the face of the brother, she sighed as she thought, "Heaven hath given me love for this noble youth to slay me! I may not cherish love for one of an accursed race! How proud

his bearing! How lofty his look! Can one so haughty be of a race of slaves? Oh, that I had never seen him, or that, seeing him, the knowledge of his degrading blood had never come to my ears! I will let my love die where it sprung up, but I feel that I shall not survive it! Why hath Heaven made me love where love is degradation? Love hopelessly! love fatally!"

Such were the thoughts of Estelle, who, before she knew the slavish lineage (not to be traced in his features, indeed) of the noble-looking youth, whom she had first seen in the banquet-room, had let love for him steal into her heart; but now, from a sense of pride and natural feeling, with painful and the most bitter grief at discovering that her affections were placed on one whom, however worthy, it would be infamy to love, strove to crush it in its birth, even to her own sacrifice.

The Count of Osma now gave orders to the captain to conduct the prisoners from the palace to their temporary place of confinement.

"Shall I bind them, signor?" he asked, approaching Renault, who was restrained from farther resistance by a look from the sorceress.

"Bind them! bind the maiden!" repeated she, on hearing this, her eyes flashing fire, and her skeleton finger lifted menacingly to the startled officer. "Guard them well with a double phalanx, if ye will, but lay no hand upon *her*! Lead on! I will go beside her."

"See to their safety with your lives!" said the count, as Renault, with his arms haughtily folded and an erect port, passed him between two men-at-arms, who guarded him with naked halberds in their hands. Azèlie, by his order, was then placed in a palanquin borne by four slaves, also environed by men-at-arms. He would have approached her with a free lip as she passed near him; but the eye of the sorceress, with the strange power it ever had over him, held him to the spot where he stood.

"Let thy wantonness slumber, Count of Osma, until the day of trial. Then shalt thou soon enough possess her, if judgment go against her."

"I have no fear of the result, and do consent to the trial, that these provincials may know I honour their laws, and that I may rivet more firmly this haughty maid's degradation. I have not forgotten the insult she offered to me three years ago!"

"Remember the day of St. Michael!" she said, striding past him as he stood in the midst of the banquet-chamber alone, following with his eye the receding palanquin with a lingering, hesitating glance, as if he would yet recall it.

But fear, irresistible, superstitious fear, of the terrible woman, and the reflection that, though delayed, his triumph was sure and his victory certain—added to which was his confidence in the fidelity of his guards—prevented him from doing it.

"Virtuous daughter of a wicked father, fear not to love where thine heart has been given. He is worthy of all thou canst bestow," said the sorceress, in a low voice, as she overtook, in the paved passage, the palanquin, beside which Estelle walked, clasping a hand of the nearly senseless Azèlie, for whom, on account of her beauty and sufferings, she felt a sisterly affection.

"What mean thy words, mother?" asked the conscious Estelle, feeling her cheek burn and her heart leap with surprise at this knowledge of a secret she had not dared to trust to herself.

"I have marked thine eyes, and there is a language in them that woman can read. Thou lovest, and yet thou wouldst not love. Thy love is thy greatest grief, and yet thy greatest joy. Thou wouldst crush it and trample it; but, the more it is trod upon, the more luxuriantly it will grow. But fear not to love; he is worthy of thee."

"I know he is all worthy, mother, but—" Here, surprised at her boldness and unintentional acknowledgment of her love, she hesitated, while the objection she was about to give utterance to faltered on her tongue.

"But he is a quadroon, thou wouldst say, and his blood attainted: I bid thee a third time love and fear not, for he is as noble and free born as thyself!"

Thus speaking, she descended the broad palace stairs at the extremity of the gallery after the palanquin, which was already at the foot of it, leaving Estelle near the door of her chamber, lost in wonder, hope, and trembling surprise. She paused a moment, dwelling on her words, and then entered her boudoir, fearing yet hoping, doubting yet believing. What a mine of happiness did the few words of the sorceress open in her heart, which the moment before was so wretched and heavy with the weight of its forbidden love ! How changed her whole nature ! Yet she had only the vague and mysterious language of this singular woman to base her joy upon. But this to her was everything. To the heart of a woman that loves, the course of a feather on the wind, the song of a bird, a dream of the night, is revelation ! Estelle cherished a sweet hope in spite of hope, and boldly fed her love with the image of him she loved.

The Count of Osma also sought his cabinet after giving orders to his slaves to bear the wounded Ras-cas to a bed, and summon the surgeon of his staff to attend him ; he had found him too useful a retainer to let him die while hope of life remained. In his cabinet he saw the Moor, whom he had not seen since he left it to conduct Don Henrique to his cell. The slave met his master's eye with a look of fear, and a countenance indicating secret treachery. Osma did not discover all that it expressed, but saw enough in his deprecating manner to excite his ever-lively suspicions.

"So thou art here, slave !" he cried, after surveying the gigantic Ethiop, who at once had cast himself on his knees before him. "Where hast thou loitered, that thou hast not been present, nor heard my voice calling to thee ?"

The slave made no reply, but, submissively bending his neck, offered to his lord his naked cimeter.

"This is ever thy defence, as if I were a Turk, and my pastime were chopping off turbaned heads. Put up thy cimeter, and to thy feet ! I have no time to dally with thee. Hie thee after my guard, follow them

to the habitation of the quadroone-mother, and bring me true report of the safeguard thither of this Renault and his sister, and the disposition of the men-at-arms about the house. Begone, for I have work for thy deadly steel anon. Take now these keys which Rascas hath laid here, and place them in thy belt, for I have made thee Don Henrique's jailer in his stead."

The Moor hung in his girdle the keys which Rascas, after returning from the dungeon of Don Henrique, had thrown down on hearing the clash of swords in Estelle's chamber, and then left the cabinet with a rapid step. The count listened till the echo of his footsteps along the gallery ceased, and then, closing the door of his cabinet, gave himself up to reflections upon the recent events which had transpired, and began to dwell upon the future with the exulting hopes of a bad man, to whom wickedness has become so habitual as to be necessary to his existence. He felt that there was an ill omen in the day appointed, and laughed as if he would mock his own fears. But the hollow sound of his laugh terrified him, and, casting himself upon an ottoman, he sought to banish in sleep the unpleasant memories which the words as well as the presence of the sorceress had awakened in his breast.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MOORISH SORCERESS.

THE written message that Renault had received in the fortress from the hand of Gobin, and which had produced such an effect upon him, was couched in these figurative words, and without date or signature.

"The wolf hath entered the fold, and borne away the lamb to his lair."

In a little more than half an hour after receiving it, and crossing the lake with his forces, he came in sight of the gate of the city with three hundred men at his back. He was impetuously thundering on, with the intention of carrying the barriers by storm, when the gray woman appeared suddenly in his path.

"Hold, Renault!" she cried, waving her arm as he approached her at the head of his men.

He instantly halted his troop, he himself drawing rein within three feet of her with so sudden a check to the impetus of his horse that he threw him back upon his haunches. The fore feet of the animal for a moment beat the air, and threatened to descend upon the breast of the sorceress, who saved herself from being struck with his hoofs by adroitly seizing him by the bit, and, with a wonderful display of coolness and strength, turning him aside.

"Dismount; I would speak with thee," she cried, authoritatively.

Impatient as he was to fly to the rescue or to the revenge of his sister, he nevertheless obeyed. Throwing his rein to one of his troop, he followed her, as she preceded him at a rapid pace, until she came beneath the wall, near an angle of one of the abutments, against which stood the ruins of a stone hut. This she entered, making a sign for him to follow.

"Nay, time is more precious than life, and why waste it in mystery, woman?" said Renault, pausing on the threshold.

"Thy sister is in no present danger! but, if thou wouldst finally save her, thou must be guided by me. Did not a message from me bring thee hither at the head of thy troop?"

"Thou hast spoken truly. Lead on! I will be guided by thee!"

She immediately entered the inner room of the dark hut, and, lifting a trap door, descended a dilapidated flight of steps. He followed her unhesitatingly, an idea of the object she had in view flashing upon his mind, and found himself in a cavernous passage, with

broken arches and an unpaved floor. Her footsteps, for he could see nothing in the gloom, guided him along the damp, subterraneous passage, which, after several intricate windings, conducted them to a flight of stairs at its extremity. These she ascended to an apartment, into which, through numerous crevices, streamed the light of the moon. After listening an instant at a door, she boldly threw it open, and Renault, to his surprise, found that he was in a street within the walls.

"The knowledge of this passage gives us possession of the town," he cried, with animation, forgetting, in his great discovery, the immediate object in which he was so deeply interested.

"Follow me," she said, on gaining the street, without pausing to look behind her.

"Alone! I can effect nothing alone! In five minutes I will have my men dismounted and let into the town," he said, going back into the building.

"Young man," she cried, sternly, "follow me! Leave thy troop to wait for thy return."

"I will not go without the power to punish this tyrant!" he replied, determinedly.

"Is not thy sister in momentary peril? The evil of one moment's delay a legion of warriors may not undo."

"I obey," he anxiously responded, and followed her.

On the way to the palace she informed him, in her brief, figurative manner, of the particulars of Azèlie's abduction, none of which had escaped her vigilant and ceaseless *espionnage*.

"She sleeps yet, say you?" he asked, with trembling.

"Until the nightingale sings its evening song. I have long been familiar, like this false slave Absulem, with this and every other draught to produce sleep. Their qualities, powers, and effects are all known to me."

"Sleeps she unprotected save by her own innocence? Alas! she is no longer the spotless and gentle dove I have so many years nestled in my bosom," he said, with bitter anguish, while the fierce grasp he held upon his

naked sword, as he strode along in the shadows of the buildings, betrayed the stern and deadly character of his thoughts.

"His own subtle and refined passion will be her safeguard till she awakes to the life and warmth of beauty. She sleeps securely."

"Pray Heaven thy words be true!"

"From the garden, after entering her chamber and writing the line to thee, which, on the way, I gave to one who has proved a faithful messenger, did I follow the Moor with his burden even to the door of his cabinet. Thence passing round the balcony, I saw her through the window laid tenderly upon an ottoman; and from Osma's words and bearing, as well as my knowledge of his character, knew that he had not caused this drugged sleep for a darker purpose than her quiet removal from thy roof to his own. Knowing the moment she would awake, I left her securely, and hastened to the gate to meet thy coming."

"Why not admit my troop?"

"They are but a handful to the Spanish army, and would defeat our purpose."

"Wherefore this interest in my sister?" asked Renault, abruptly.

"Thou shalt shortly know, but not to-night. Now think of her safety, for yonder is the palace."

"And, hark! there is the nightingale singing," cried Renault, bounding forward.

"Be not too hasty, young man. Remain here in this recess of the Cathedral tower, and await my return."

Before he could object or make any reply, she had crossed the space between the church and the palace, and approached a casement that extended quite to the ground. Pressing her finger against a corner section of the lattice, the diamond-shaped leaf of the window opened inwardly, and let her into a low hall in the basement of the palace. She crossed it with a rapid and familiar step, and, ascending a winding stairway, reached a paved saloon on the main floor. Here soldiers,

retainers, and lounging officers caused her to turn aside and glide in the deep shadows among the columns until she came to a door ajar, which by a private stair communicated with the suite of apartments occupied by the Count of Osma. In a few seconds, avoiding in her progress, with singular adroitness and address, an encounter with any of the members of the household, she reached the marble passage, and the next instant was in the very cabinet of the count, an unseen listener and witness of the scene between him and Azélie. When the terrified girl flew past her, closely pursued by the count, she followed her in turn as swiftly, till she saw her at the feet of Estelle.

"She is for the moment safe," she said, retiring in the shade as Osma passed; "I will now bring the brother hither, that he may fall into the snare I would have set for him. If he be suffered to go at liberty, the public and overwhelming judgment I design for Osma will be defeated by his rashness. This trial Osma shall consent to. Until then, Renault must not be suffered to go free or communicate with his band. There is seeming evil in this, but good will come of it, and the Spaniard's shame and infamy be the more sure. If Allah let me live till the day of trial, I will turn my face to Mecca, and then die."

Thus communing with her thoughts, she re-entered the gallery, and was leaving it by the way she had come, when at the other end of it her active eye detected a door slowly opening. Instantly concealing herself in a recess, she saw the Moor emerge from the secret staircase leading to the dungeons of the Inquisition, and advance towards the cabinet. She directly placed herself before him in his path with a gesture of menace and silence. With a face full of fear, he crossed his hands upon his breast, and stood tremblingly awaiting her commands.

"Thou hast the confidence of thy master. Thy word is even as his. Go to the captain of the guard, and bid him remain at his post whatsoever may happen within the palace, and bid him admit myself and

those I bring with me without question, as if by thy master's order. As thou fearest me, obey!"

The Moor made an obeisance of submission, as if to a supernatural being, and was about to leave her, when she inquired the cause of his appearance through the secret door in the wall in so stealthy a manner. From him she learned with pleasure, what she had desired to know, the place of Don Henrique's confinement, of whose arrest she had been an unseen witness while watching to counteract Osma's plots.

"Hath his death been decreed?" she asked, eagerly.

"His soul will be with Allah with the next sunrise," answered the Moor.

"Meet me here at midnight with the keys of his dungeon, or beware my power!" she said, authoritatively.

"Sulem hath no will but that of Azrael whom thou servest," he replied, in a tone of superstitious awe, sinking into an Oriental posture of dread adoration.

"To thine errand quickly," she commanded; and, watching him till he disappeared, returned to the outside of the palace by the way she had entered, and going into the shadow of the tower, where Renault, towards whom her intentions now wore a mysterious complexion, waited with the utmost impatience for her reappearance.

"The tidings!" he gasped, seizing her arm as she approached.

"As I would have them. The crisis for thy presence has arrived! Follow me!"

"Past the guards?" he demanded, with surprise, as she boldly crossed an angle of the Place d'Armes, where citizens and soldiers off duty were listening in groups to the governor's band, which was filling the square with martial and stirring music.

"Do not hesitate. Come boldly on! Thou canst not enter in safety the way I came."

Surprised, yet not intimidated by the danger he incurred in exposing himself thus openly, with a price set upon his head, he obeyed her. Partly concealing

his features with the cape of the short capote he wore, he passed through the guards by her side unchallenged, though not without being, from his strange companionship, an object of curiosity. The Moor was standing on the last step of the stone staircase as the sorceress, with Renault by her side, mounted the flight of steps. In a moment afterward, Renault, whose feet were winged by the loud voice of the infuriated count as he seized upon Estelle to separate her from his victim, was in the presence of the Spaniard at the very crisis of the most imminent peril. From that moment until guarded prisoners to their own dwelling, the fate of both brother and sister is known.

Renault felt happy even as a prisoner when he reflected that Azèlie was safe, and that, ere she could fall a victim to the deferred passion of a lawless tyrant, she might yet be offered up a sacrifice on the shrine of virgin purity. On taking possession of his habitation again, the court of which now echoed strangely to the tread of sentinels, he reflected in great perplexity upon the singular conduct of the enchantress. She had clearly manifested an interest in him, yet it was by her agency he had been made captive. She had shown a singular regard for Azèlie, yet by her means the trial, so certain to result in the condemnation of the accused, had been determined on.

"Why," thought he, "did she not exert that wonderful power she possesses over this savage Spaniard, by demanding and securing for her both liberty and a cessation of his persecution. Nevertheless, I feel a disposition to trust her; but it is because, perhaps, that there is none else to trust save Heaven!" He thus mused with himself; and then, kneeling by the couch of his sister, implored the protection and guidance of that Heaven for one so dear to him, so beset by danger, and so borne down with such a weight of sorrow.

From the gate of Renault's dwelling, whither she had accompanied the palanquin, the sorceress took her way in the direction of the bounds of the city; and en-

tering the mansion from which she had issued with Renault, in a few seconds was outside of the walls, walking with rapid strides towards a group of horsemen, who seemed to have rode near the town for the purpose of reconnoitring. One of them saw her and spurred towards her. It was Charleval, the companion in arms of Renault, who, during the hour's mysterious absence of his friend and chief, had become so impatient as to meditate setting fire to the gates and entering the city, believing he must have been betrayed by the mysterious being who had commanded him to follow her. The others of the group were De Thoyras, who had arrived after Renault's departure with forty chasseurs, Gobin, and the trumpeter Boviedo, the two latter mounted upon the same steed; Gobin having generously restored to his paunchy friend the animal of which he had despoiled him, on finding him, upon his return from the fortress, sitting on the ground where he had cast himself, sadly bewailing his loss.

"Where is our chief?" demanded Charleval, on coming up to her.

"In prison," she said, firmly.

"This is thy work, hag! Thy treachery hath cost thee thy life," cried Charleval, presenting a pistol at her head.

"Nay, cousin Charleval," cried Gobin, galloping up at the instant astride behind Boviedo, and striking up the pistol, "it were worth thy soul to harm mother Beelzebub."

"I fear him not," she said, without being moved at her imminent peril. "If thou art the chief in the absence of Renault," she continued, addressing the impatient Charleval, "it is with thee my business lies. Know that Osma the Spaniard hath a lawless passion for Azèlie the Quadroone, and this night hath stolen her from her chamber and borne her to his palace."

"This I know: and the licentious Spaniard had better have formed a harem with every fair quadroone in the province than placed eyes on Azèlie. Not a sword in Louisiana will rest in its scabbard until she be rescued or avenged."

"This is the spirit I would see awakened. Renault was admitted by me through a secret passage and conducted to the palace. There was no moment for delay, and his single arm was of more avail than thy small force of horsemen, with the whole Spanish army to withstand thee. It was in part to save the massacre of yonder horsemen that I took him alone. He rescued his sister from dishonour, but is himself made prisoner."

"This is both good and ill news! He must be rescued, or the blood of another victim will glut the vengeance of the Spanish demon," cried Charleval, with determination.

"Thou art too impetuous," she said, sternly. "Osma's day of retribution is at hand. Know that, defeated in possessing Azèlie, he hath claimed both herself and Renault to be slaves, and by a certain parchment hath sworn to make good his claim. They have appealed to the tribunal, and on the sixth day from this their trial is to take place. In the mean while, both are imprisoned in their own dwelling, which is strongly guarded."

"This is villany most deep and subtle," exclaimed Charleval through his clinched teeth.

"Hear! The thousand savage warriors Renault informs me you have sent for will be here by the fifth night. Till then, retire to thy fortress, and augment thy numbers with true men. The tribunal will be open at ten on the morning of the sixth day. At that hour be at the head of thy forces within yonder forest, but let nor plume nor steel-point be seen from the walls. The whole of the Spanish troops at the same hour will be drawn up in the Place d'Armes to protect the cabildo, while sitting, from any outbreak of popular feeling on account of unjust judgment. Few will be left to guard the gates, and all men's minds will be bent on affairs within rather than without the city. At this crisis I will meet thee, and secretly conduct thy forces into the town. Then disposing them at hand near the precincts of the hall of council, thou mayest

thyself enter it and witness the trial ; for I would have all men behold the judgment of Osma."

"Woman, who art thou?"

"The friend of Renault and Azèlie. Wouldst thou know more to give me thy confidence?"

"'Tis enough ; Renault hath spoken to me of thee, and himself trusted thee. He shall not be sacrificed by any hesitation on the part of his friends. It shall be as thou sayest. At ten on St. Michael's day, yonder frowning line of forest shall hold within its spreading arms sixteen hundred warriors."

"And ten minutes afterward they shall be within the walls, moving silently and swiftly towards the palace, armed with the judgment of the guilty. Depart, and gather thy strength. The night wears apace, and each moment now is as a day to thee."

"Farewell, wonderful and mysterious woman ! Whoever and whatever thou art, I know thou hast given Osma and the city into our hands !"

The sorceress made no reply, but, waving him impatiently to depart, he once more bade her adieu, and, accompanied by the others, including the jester, galloped towards the squadron of horse which was drawn up in a solid column on the edge of the woods. On reaching it he gave a single brief order, and the whole troop, wheeling to the right, moved at a fast trot into the wood, and were shortly afterward lost to the eye and ear.

She looked after them until the last faint rumble of the fall of a thousand hoofs had ceased, and then slowly and thoughtfully, as if weighing over again the plans she had projected, returned to the hut and entered the city. When the heavy tongue of the Cathedral bell had sounded the first stroke of twelve, she secretly entered the palace through the panel in the Moorish casement by which she had formerly gained access to the interior, and, ere it had sounded the last deep note, she was in the marble gallery, gliding like a spectre along its sides in the direction of the private door leading to the dungeons. All was silent as the

tomb. Osma slept on his guilty pillow ; Estelle was in her chamber, but seated by the lattice in her night-robe, thinking of Renault, and devising some plan for his escape.

The Moor was not at his post ; and, while she waited for him, a groan, mingled with an execration, startled her. It was from Rascas, who lay on a pallet in the antechamber of the cabinet, suffering from his wound. The next instant she was by his pillow of pain. A faint lamp at his bed's head shed a ghastly light upon his countenance. His eyes were shut, and she turned back her cowl from her face and touched him. He then opened them and gazed upon her, at first with a vacant look ; but intelligence lightened his glance, and he cried with fear,

"Away, accursed sorceress ! Hast thou come to force me to sell my soul !" and he covered his eyes with his hands, as if he would shut out the sight of her, while his whole frame shuddered.

"Ha, ha ! Rascas the assassin, as men call thee, dost thou have hope for thy soul, that thou tremblest for it ?"

"I am going to die !" he said, as if under the extreme of mortal fear, and wholly overcome with mental horror.

"And now thou wouldst play the coward, who hast played the villain so bravely. Didst thou not know thou wouldst one day die, that death hath now taken thee by surprise ?"

"In full life I feared it not. It seemed a long way off—beyond the utmost limits of old age."

"Thou didst think all men mortal but thyself. Thus it is, and death ever comes to all unexpectedly. It has thus come to thee, and methinks thou art poorly prepared to meet it."

"What shall I do ?" he cried, with miserable eagerness, which could ill conceal the hopeless despair beneath it.

"Do as I bid thee, and thou shalt live."

"Live !" he repeated, seizing her hand and wildly pressing it to his lips.

"Live, and live to repent!"

"Give me only life—I care not for repentance! Oh, if I could know I should not die now—*die now!*" he repeated, lifting himself to his elbow, and anxiously reading her face with his feverish eyes. "Give me only life, and I laugh at repentance! ha, ha, ha! Oh, life, *life*, LIFE!" he continued to repeat, as the Arabian dying for thirst in the desert cries "Water, water, water!"

She surveyed him a few moments with a look of scornful contempt, and then said in a deep voice,

"Thou knowest the secret crimes of thy master's life."

"Who hath told thee?" he demanded, with fear.

"It matters not. This knowledge may save thy life."

"How?" he eagerly demanded, his desire to live overcoming the agony of his wound, which only betrayed itself in the involuntary contractions of the muscles of his face.

"By bearing testimony against him."

"Will this give me life? Will it?"

"I have learned from the report of the surgeon the condition of thy wound. It is mortal for all the skill of any chirurgeon. He hath said you will die!"

"Save, give me life, and I will do what thou wilt, were it to bury my knife in my master's heart!"

"Ha, ha! Thou wert penitent but now for thy crimes, and thou wouldst purchase longer life by adding to them."

"So that I live, I care not for the price. Put death off *now! save me now!*" he cried, with an eloquence of fear that astonished her, while it excited her contempt.

"Though surgeon's skill will not avail thee, mine will. Swear that thou wilt answer truth against thy master when thou shalt be called upon, and I will exert my power to save thee from death."

"I swear."

"I little heed thy oath. Know that the ointment I

shall apply to thy wound is a deadly poison. Six days it must be applied, morning and evening, with the rising and setting of the sun. The seventh day the patient would die a mass of corruption but for a counter-poison, which, for seven days more applied to the wound, perfecteth a cure."

"If thou shouldst fail me on the seventh day—"

"Then thou wouldst become a livid corpse, so that no man could look upon thee."

"I will not trust thee, fiendish enchantress!"

"Be it so. Thou wilt not live to the third day from this in thy present state."

The assassin shuddered, hid his face in the bed-covering, and writhed with intense misery, both of mind and body. At length, groaning heavily and hopelessly, he cried,

"Apply thy medicament, woman, and my testimony shall be thine."

She drew from her girdle a small pouch, that, among other articles, contained a crystal vial holding a pale, amber-coloured oil, which, on removing the silver stopper, filled the chamber with an extremely pungent, yet not an unpleasant odour. After cleansing the wound in his side, she poured the healing fluid upon it, and bound it skilfully up. He felt instant relief; and, after pressing her hands with a grateful look, suddenly, from a total cessation of pain, fell into a deep sleep. She contemplated for a moment the effect of her skill, and then sought once more the private outlet from the gallery. A few seconds afterward the Moor appeared, having been waiting at the door of the palace for her entrance that way, and now betrayed evident surprise at finding her already at the place appointed. Receiving impatiently his explanation for his delay, she sternly bade him lead her to the cell of his prisoner.

CHAPTER XIII.

SCENE BETWEEN THE LOVERS.

DON HENRIQUE had been left, by the refined cruelty of Rascas, who proved a faithful successor to those Fathers of the Inquisition, whose inhumanity had framed the iron vaults beneath the foundations of the prison, chained by the waist and hands to iron staples in the side of the vault. He could now neither stand nor sit; and, fatigued by sorrow and overcome by his miserable condition, he had fallen into a troubled sleep while suspended, as it were, from the wall. A massive golden crucifix lay at his feet, which Osma had left with him in mockery.

He had given up all hopes of life; and, striving to forget every earthly tie, fixed his mind on that world into which he felt he was soon to enter. Yet in his dreams he was again in the boudoir of Azèlie, kneeling at her feet, and breathing his passion into her listening ear; was once more in the hall of his fathers, and wandering over the hills of sunny Spain. The spirit that guided his dreams was merciful, and presented to his mind only objects that were agreeable and most opposite to the mournful realities of his waking hours. From the midst of one of these pleasant visions he was startled by the clanging of chains and the removing of bars and bolts.

"Alas! Heaven be merciful to me!" he ejaculated, awaking to the reality of his unhappy condition. "Now is the assassin at hand whose steel will be the key to let my weary spirit into the world beyond! Must I die here like an ox! Oh, for one good sword, and an arm unchained to wield it, that I might fall like a man and a knight!"

The door of his dungeon opened, and the Moor ap-

peared, holding a shaded lantern in his hand, followed by a tall figure wrapped in a gray mantle, which he at once knew must be the sorceress who had taken such an interest in the fate of Azèlie, and also in his own. Hope—that blessed angel, and Heaven's best gift to poor humanity in this sad world—was instantly reawakened in his breast by her appearance. She paused on the threshold of the cell, and with a look of compassion and sympathy, that contrasted singularly with her harsh, sepulchral features, surveyed him in silence. At length she advanced, and, kneeling, took his hand, and said with reverence,

"Unhappy prince! Thy cruel captivity is now ended! Alas! that I should behold a prince of Spain in such a state of degradation and misery! Unlock these chains and cast them into the sea, that the record of this dishonour may not exist on the earth!" she cried, with stern indignation.

Sulem obeyed, and Don Henrique stood erect, unbound. "Is this a dream?" he asked, with troubled doubt.

"Thou art free, noble signor. He who hath put thee here will soon take thy place."

"Ha! hath the city rebelled?"

"No; but Justice hath come to her seat."

"You speak mysteriously!"

"It shall be made as clear as sunlight, prince, to thee and every man."

"Prince! I did then hear aright! How knowest thou me?"

"If thy secret be to six, doth it surprise thee that a seventh hath it? Be it enough that I know thee, and wherefore thou art a wanderer from the palace of thy fathers. Follow me, and thou shalt learn all thou wouldst know."

"Then tell me here—*here*, before thou movest," he cried, catching her by the mantle, "what of—of—"

"The maiden whose love thou hast won! Be happy, prince! She is safe, and in all honour beneath her own roof!"

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"And thou hast saved her?" he cried, scarcely crediting what he had heard.

"I have, noble signor."

"Then Heaven bless thee—bless thee! for—for I cannot!" he articulated with choked utterance, and, falling on his knees, kissed her robe and burst into tears.

In twenty minutes afterward Don Henrique had Azèlie folded in his arms, whom at length he released only to receive the fraternal embrace of Renault. The Moor, whom the sorceress had enslaved to her own will, had treacherously admitted them in the face of the unsuspecting guards, who silently acknowledged the seal of their commander in his hands, as well as the scarce less authoritative command of the confidential slave. Having witnessed their meeting, the sorceress departed alone and unquestioned.

Estelle sat by her lattice until long after twelve, communing with herself upon the fate of Renault and of his sister; but the former was uppermost in her thoughts; and each moment love for the handsome and spirited youth grew stronger in her heart from that it fed upon.

Suddenly she rose; and, casting a cloak about her, and otherwise disguising herself as she had once before done, she stole from her chamber, and, unobserved, reached her father's cabinet.

He slept where an hour or two before he had cast himself upon the ottoman, and a tall silver candelabrum with wax lights alone burned upon his escritoir. She softly approached, and from a secret drawer of the secretaire took two of several private seals it contained. Retiring, she hastily left the palace, making use of one of the signets in passing the guard. Then speaking to a soldier, she demanded to be directed to the residence of Renault the Quadroon. From his ready knowledge of this habitation, she discovered that the recent circumstances had made it known to most of the governor's guard. Having learned from him its situation, she departed in search of it. After

traversing a part of one street, and turning an angle or two of others, she came suddenly upon a sentry, who challenged her from the foot of a garden wall on the opposite side of the way. Ignorant of the countersign, she knew not what to answer, and trembled lest she should be discovered. Her hesitation was observed by the soldier, who challenged a second time, at the same time bringing his piece to his shoulder.

"Camarada!" she answered, going towards him.

"Stand and give the countersign," he demanded, as she reached the middle of the way.

"Throw up your piece, sirrah!" she cried, in an authoritative tone, advancing upon him. "Do you dare menace a messenger of the governor? Behold my authority!" she added, holding out the signet.

He advanced a step and took it from her, and, after carefully examining it, returned it. "You might as easily, signor, have given the countersign, if it is such a long-winded word as 'Death to Osma's foes,' as to have given me this trouble," he muttered; and, shouldering his piece, he bade her pass on.

With alacrity, she cheerfully obeyed, and was soon at the treble-guarded portal of the dwelling. Here, making use of the countersign she had so unexpectedly obtained possession of, as well as of the signet, she was admitted into the court, muffled to the eyes as she was, without question or hesitation on the part of the sentinels. Azèlie's boudoir was pointed out to her, and the captain of the guard, accompanying her to within a few feet of the curtained door, returned again to his post. She paused. Her heart beat tumultuously. She had come thither scarcely reflecting on her object in doing so, and had laid no plan of conduct for her guidance. The danger of Renault and his sister had inspired her to take a step at which she now trembled with maidenly shame and hesitation. They were in peril from her father's united passion and vengeance, and she had suggested to her mind, as she sat in her chamber, the idea to rescue them through

the agency of the signets which she had afterward taken for the purpose.

But, now that the moment of action had arrived—that a curtain alone separated her from the young *courreur chef*, who had inspired her with so tender and deep a passion—her heart failed. She leaned against a column of the cloister for support, and summoned all her strength of mind and native energy of character to her aid. At length she became collected, and formed the resolution to present herself boldly before them, offer them the way to escape, conduct them through the guards disguised, and, by the aid of the countersign and signet, out of the city gates to liberty.

"I may never see him more," she thought; "and he will have departed without knowing he has left so true a heart behind him. Perhaps he would scorn my love! Yet his eye told me otherwise, modestly as he sought to shade his love beneath the downcast lid. I will nevertheless sacrifice my love to his freedom. That he is worthy of my affection—that he is *not* of the race that claims him—my heart, as well as the language of that mysterious woman, doth tell me. No, I have too proud a heart to cast my love unworthily. I know he could not be debased, or he would not have awakened an interest in the bosom of the daughter of the house of Osma."

Thus run her thoughts as she paused with her grasp upon the curtain that was dropped before the entrance. She was about to lift it, when the voice of Renault within arrested her hand as suddenly as if it had been paralyzed.

"It is certain, dearest sister," he said, in a melancholy voice, "that this trial, which this wicked Spaniard hath appointed, will be a mockery like that of the councillors. We can hope for no justice but from Heaven."

"Can that fatal parchment by no means be taken from him, Renault?" asked an earnest voice, which she recognised to be that of Don Henrique.

"If it could be done, it would overthrow, in the eye

of justice, his claim ; which, with this in his hand, he may sustain where false judges and the tools of his will sit in judgment ; for every honest judge would see that his claim is founded on injustice and tyranny."

"Yet, with this evidence in his possession," said Don Henrique, "the law must sustain him in his claim without taking into consideration the abstract question of the purpose he has in view in maintaining and defending it. I fear it will go against you, notwithstanding the hope held out by this wonderful sorceress."

"She did not say that it would not be decided against us, brother," said the silvery and touching voice of Azèlie ; "but that, if it were, the judgment would fall on his head instead of ours."

"Thou hast great faith, sweet Azèlie, in this woman," said Don Henrique ; "and I must acknowledge I think she hath some plan in view for your safety and Osma's shame. Nevertheless, if we could get possession of this parchment before the day of trial, we might, perhaps, through the aid of this sorceress, defeat him."

"I wish it could be done," said Renault ; "I have little faith in her ; for I have thought that my arrest is owing to her. Indeed, had she led me, with all my men, into the town, Osma would have been my prisoner instead of my being his!"

"And wouldst thou then have saved me, brother, as thou didst do?" asked Azèlie, reprovingly.

"Nay, perhaps it is best as it is," he answered ; "for I should have been reluctant, with my sincere passion for that lovely creature, his daughter, to have done him outrage. For her sake, methinks I could submit to any wrong that touched not Azèlie."

"She is a noble girl, and I have seen much of her on shipboard," said Don Henrique ; "not to have been ruined for any man's love, by her father's masculine method of educating her, shows that she possesses no ordinary mind. Didst thou tell her of thy love?"

"Nay—I am a quadroon, and could not insult her," he said, bitterly.

"Thou mightst have told it without shame to her or thyself; for methinks I have never met a man better fitted to be worn in a noble maiden's heart than thou!"

"She would have scorned me."

"Renault," answered Don Henrique, seriously, "from some words that fell from the sorceress, who seems to know all things hidden from common eyes, I do not believe thee to be a quadroon."

"Not a quadroon, signor?"

"No."

"Who and what am I, then?"

"I cannot tell. Doubtless she will disclose it to thee, as she has promised to reveal, if thou wilt let me love thy gentle sister here, who I am," he said, smiling.

"Would it could be proved so! But my mother!"

"I do not believe she is thy mother."

"I would, indeed, it could be proven so; yet I would not," he added, "I would not it should be thus; for I should lose this sweet sister then."

Estelle, whose eager interest in their conversation led her slightly to lift the curtain, beheld him then tenderly bend over and embrace Azèlie, who, with Don Henrique, was reclining on gorgeous rugs at his feet. She gazed on the group, with a desire to take the place in it her heart had chosen. Suddenly, as if impelled by an irresistible impulse to obey her wishes, she drew aside the hangings, and was in the midst ere she well knew it. Don Henrique and Renault both sprang to their feet on seeing an intruder enveloped to the brow in a Spanish roquelaure, with a broad *sombrero* flapping over his eyes. But they were both without arms, and only gazed upon him with suspicion and defiance.

"Nay, Don Henrique," she said, turning with instinctive delicacy to the young Spaniard, instead of ad-

dressing herself to Renault, "be not alarmed! I pray you both pardon the step; it has in it your safety."

She removed the hat and dropped the mantle from her shoulders as she spoke, but not before Renault had recognised the disguise, and the voice that no disguise could hide from his true ear.

"Senorita Estelle!" exclaimed Don Henrique, on beholding her.

"My deliverer!" cried Azèlie, flying to her to embrace her feet; but she prevented her, and caught her in her arms.

Renault stood by silent and sorrowful. Duty and honour bade him hide his love, and smother it ere it should break out. But she had overheard the confession of his love to Don Henrique. She now saw his embarrassment—construed his feelings—read his inmost soul. She lifted her eyes, and they encountered his. With a smile she then advanced towards him; and with a graceful dignity of manner, and an open frankness, yet modesty of speech that was extraordinary, said,

"Noble Renault, I have unawares overheard your words in which you confessed your love for the daughter of your foe. The time and circumstances allow no disguise, no empty and heartless forms and passages of ceremony. If it will make thy brow less sad and thy heart lighter, know from my lips that thy love is returned—nay, had its birth with thine! If thou art proved, as I trust and believe thou wilt be, one of my own race, however lowly be thy lot in it, my hand shall be thine if thou demandest it. But if thou art of the race of bondsmen, which Heaven forefend! though my heart is and must ever be thine, my bridegroom will be the church. Wilt thou receive my love on these hard terms, which only as a true and noble Spanish maiden it becometh me to offer, and which, if I know thee aright, it beseemeth thee only to accept?"

"Dearest and most noble lady," said Renault, kneeling at her feet, "thou hast made me the happiest of beings. This ingenuous confession on thy part, which

my ignoble condition would never have led me to make, shows the greatness of thy mind as well as the depth and purity of thy love. Thou hast well understood me. Knowing my degraded birth, never would my love for thee have allowed me to forget it. On no other terms than those thou hast named should I have dared to think of one spotless and noble as thyself. Thou, a Castilian by birth, of a noble race, of far and high descent, of unblemished blood, whose rank and beauty would command the homage of the highborn and noble, *thou* to speak thus to me ! Lady ! I am at once humbled and exalted !”

She extended her hand, much moved at his words, and with reverence and devotion he pressed it to his lips.

“I trust, Don Henrique,” she said, turning to him with a becoming embarrassment, “that the strangeness of our circumstances and situations, added to the unsettled state of these times, which may excuse many departures from conventional rules, will excuse me in your eyes from overstepping the bounds of decorum ?”

“Nay, Estelle, there needeth no other apology than that thy love hath plainly given,” he said, with a smile.

“I need not ask from thee wherefore thou hast lingered here, under plea of being wounded, Sir Cavalier,” she retorted, glancing her eyes from himself to Azèlie, who betrayed so much ingenuous confusion at her significant words, that Estelle, after admiring her a moment, suddenly changed the current of ideas by saying abruptly, yet playfully, to Renault,

“Think not, signor, I came hither to declare my love to thee ! ’Twas but the overhearing of thine own confession that drew mine from me. I came hither to rescue thee and thine : now our conversation takes a serious turn ! ’Twere madness to wait here for the trial. My father hath the wills of the members of the *cabildo* in his own hands ; they are his creatures ! It therefore matters nothing whether he be its president or not. It is a hard saying for the daughter of a dearly-loved father, but he will have you condemned !

Your fate is sealed in his heart ! To wait, therefore, is to sacrifice yourselves. Fly !”

“ We are prisoners and unarmed, dearest lady,” said Renault ; “ flight were impossible.”

“ I have here the means. The password of your guard is, must I say it to *thee* ? ‘ Death to Osma’s foes ! ’ This signet will open every barrier between you and liberty.”

“ Fair Estelle,” said Don Henrique, after seeing from Renault’s face that his opinion was the same with his own, “ this plan may be feasible, yet it is attended with great danger. Gratitude is due to you for this self-sacrifice, and imminent risk on your part to propose and offer it. To be retaken would be certain ruin and death ; while it would appear to the world like guilt, the consciousness of justly being in bondage to him, and he would make use of it to the degradation of his victims and the enlargement of his own triumph. Besides—and I have great faith in her—this Moorish sorceress, who has so much power over thy father, has given us hopes that the trial will result to the honour of one party and the disgrace of the other.”

“ That is my father ! This, I must tell you, is what I fear. It is this that would lead me to aid the escape of both, that whatever evil this dreadful woman hath ready to pour upon his head may be averted—”

“ And fall upon the heads of Renault and Azeliè,” said Don Henrique, with bitter reproof.

“ Oh, whither—how shall I turn ? ’Twill wring my soul either way,” she cried, with anguish. “ Aid me, Don Henrique ! ”

“ Let things take their course. Thou hast confessed thy interest in Renault. Hast thou not, then, a hope depending on this very trial—a proof to be substantiated ? Let events flow on ; but let us prepare for them, and, if it is possible, lessen thy father’s power to do harm. We look upon thee now as of our own party, how much soever thou lovest thy father ; and thou mayst serve us and thyself with no more treason to him than virtue will forgive. To his cabinet thou

hast free access at all hours. The parchment of manumission which he now holds must be obtained, and placed in Renault's possession."

"It will not avail, signor. He will yet call on the trial, and demand judgment on his own oral claim."

"Be it so. Such a decision will be unjust and without law, and Renault and Azélie will have the sympathy of the people on their side. A decision supported by the parchment would meet, notwithstanding the popularity of Renault, with their passive acquiescence."

"It shall be done," said Estelle, firmly, after a moment's reflection, during which she underwent a keen and trying conflict between her filial duty and her love for Renault.

She left them after saying this, and in half an hour afterward the fatal parchment was in the possession of Renault.

During the interval before the morning of St. Michael's Day, the brother and sister remained imprisoned and undisturbed in their own dwelling, with, unknown to all save themselves, the society of Don Henrique, who had determined to appear at the trial, and to support his loved Azélie in the ordeal through which she had to pass. The sorceress, even up to the morning of the sixth day, did not again make her appearance, and their faith in her began to give way to doubts and distressing fears. From Estelle, who visited them nightly, disguised as she had been at first, they learned that the Moor, by the direction, as they afterward understood, of the sorceress, had reported to her father the death of Don Henrique in prison, at which he expressed a degree of joy that surprised her, until Don Henrique, with as much forbearance as the subject would admit of, related to her the cause of his displeasure against him. While from the Moor, who had become friendly and secretly attentive to their comfort, they learned that the Count of Osma had ordered him, without expressing a desire to see it, to leave the body of his rival in the dungeon where he supposed him to have perished, to wall up the door, cover the trapdoor

above with a pavement, and otherwise concealing all traces and signs of a subterranean vault, convert his prison into his tomb.

CHAPTER XIV.

SCENES ON ST. MICHAEL'S EVE.

SCENE FIRST.

Osma and the Assassin.

It had just fallen dark on the eve of St. Michael when the Count of Osma left his cabinet; and, after cautiously guarding against observation, entered the faintly-illuminated anteroom, where, stretched upon his pallet, Rascas still lay, weak and in pain, yet hourly convalescing under the daily application of the healing unguent of the sorceress.

"How fares it with thee?" he asked, closing the door and approaching the pillow.

"Ill at ease, my lord, ill at ease. Is to-morrow St. Michael's?"

"It is, and seems as it would never come for my impatience. Each hour I am deprived of my charming quadroone is a loss of bliss no future time can restore. Had I not given my knightly word to this hag, and that the trial is in all men's mouths, I would, ere now, have put an end to this mummerly. I trust thou wilt be afoot again soon, man."

"The day after the morrow will be the seventh day!" murmured the wounded man. "If she fail me!"

"What is this thou art muttering within thy lips—prayers? Be not so pious withal; thou art not so near death as thou fearest. By the rood, I would not

so readily lose thee ! I have e'en now need of thy aid, and have come hither to bid thee point out to me some trusty villain of thy comrades who may take thy place till thou art on thy legs again. I would have his service this night."

"I do know of none save Paul Carra, and I think he hath of late taken to the lakes."

"Canst thou call to mind none other?"

"Not a man, my lord, who hath a true hand and eye ; not one that can strike the steel home at a blow."

"Out upon thee, villain ! Thou art so full of iniquity, that thou canst talk of nothing but foul murders. If men say 'steel,' thou dost fancy it sheathed in a man's ribs. I want no blood-service to-night. Some one hath purloined from my escritoir the parchment of manumission on which I would base my claim upon this Renault and his sister. I believe it to be the handiwork of my daughter. But if I can bring about what I have in contemplation, this theft shall be turned to good account, and whoever took it will pray the saints they had left it. Knowest thou this outlaw, Jules Caronde, who made havoc of my men-at-arms, and since lieth sorely wounded in some place without the town?"

"I know him, my lord. He hath lost a hand in the affray, and hath become savage as a wounded lion."

"I would find him. Direct me to his den."

"Wilt thou go thyself?"

"Thou canst find me no one else. Sulem, of late, I have begun to suspect of treachery, which, if I make clear, he shall answer for with his head ere sunset to-morrow. Give me the direction to find this Caronde. I will see him in person."

"After issuing from the Pontchartrain gate, ride forward a quarter of a league, and take the first left-hand path that offers through the forest. Continue along the by-road until you come to a rivulet, which follow a few hundred yards to its outlet in a small mere. On the shore of this mere, upon a small promontory, you will discover a dilapidated square tower.

Ride to its gate, and in a tree that branches above it you will find, hanging within reach of a horseman's hand, a chasseur's horn. Sound this sharply twice. You will then be admitted."

"Thou hast given it plainly, good Rascas. Adieu. I commend thee to sleep in my absence."

SCENE SECOND.

Gobin and Boviedo.

THE Count of Osma left the gloomy apartment of the invalid. A few moments afterward, a horseman, disguised so as to defeat the closest scrutiny, rode forth from the palace yard, and galloped in the direction of the eastern gate. He soon arrived in sight of the barrier, and, answering the distant challenge of the sentinel, rode up, and was about to demand to see the officer of the guard, when a noise of clamorous voices without the gate, in altercation with the soldier within, both surprised him and excited his curiosity. He listened an instant, and thought he detected the voice of Boviedo, his disgraced trumpeter.

"By the valour of an Aragonese trumpeter! by the fear of an Aragonese knock o' the head wi' an Aragonese fist, let me in, thou coward! Dost thou fear two men will take thy city, that thou guardest the gate o't so closely? Wilt thou keep two cavaliers standing without to be scalped by the heathenish salvages? Let down thy bars and admit us, thou son of a Philistine's daughter."

"Thou mayst hammer with thy tongue till day-dawn, Signor Boviedo. All men know the governor hath disgraced thee for suffering thyself to be discomfited with the loss of horse and colours," replied the soldier. "Get in as thou didst get out."

"I did get out when the gates were open for the soldiers to go forth to gather the dead slain by the

enemy. Touching my disgrace, it hath been wiped away, inasmuch as I have won another steed at the sword's point."

"Thy sword's point should be stuck i' thy throat for that lie," said a harsh voice, which the count recognised as Gobin's; "he got him grazing i' the field after the fight, gossip o' the inside there; and he caught him only by climbing a tree, and letting himself down upon his back, to keep clear of his heels and teeth. Marry come up! he did win him like a true man."

"Friend Gobin, dost thou vilify thy friend, that hath escaped with thee from yonder heathenish salvages, that would ha' made broth o' our bones?" said Boviedo, in an under tone. "Let me lie, so I but get in at the gate by it, and hold thy peace. When I get restored to mine office again, I will remember thee."

"Let gossip Boviedo in, cousin," said Gobin, aloud, "and he will teach thee marvels! He will tell thee the art o' lying till thou art black i' the face, and then lying thyself white again! He will prove to thee how that a soldier's valour lieth in his wind, and he of the king's army who is the most valiant is his trumpeter. Then playing thee a tune for an ensample o' his own wind, marry! will he make thee believe he is the most valorous man in Spain! But bid him defend himself wi' his sword, and he will cry *peccavi*, and show thee naught but an arrant Aragonese coward hath been this braggadocio."

"Ho, signor! what is this uproar?" demanded Osma of the captain of the post, who now made his appearance from the guardroom.

"I know not, my lord," answered the officer, instantly by the voice recognising the commander-in-chief; "'tis but some idle conference with some *paysans* without and my soldiers."

"See if there be more than two, and, if not, admit them."

The officer surveyed them through a slide in the side of the gate, and then, turning to the chief, said,

"There be but two men, signor, both mounted upon one steed."

"Dost thou know either of them?"

"One is the trumpeter Boviedo, and the other, by his motley dress, is the *natural* I have seen in the town."

"Let them in."

The gate was immediately thrown open, and Boviedo and Gobin, both mounted astride a sorry-looking animal, were admitted within the barrier.

"How now, sirrah! what means this mummerly?" demanded Osma of his quondam trumpeter, with more of a smile than a frown.

"High and mighty excellency," answered Boviedo, who had evidently lost both fat and wind in his exile from the presence of his master, whose presence he now hailed with the proud confidence of one who has achieved a praiseworthy deed, and feels satisfied with his own conduct, "it was by thy just displeasure that I was dismissed from thy service, until I had recovered by mine own valour a steed for that of which I was so feloniously despoiled. Behold me mounted upon a charger won by mine own prowess from the enemy! Lo! this saddle! is it not of the fashion of the *courreur du bois*? Lo! this bridle of hide! is it not like the bridle of the enemy? Dost thou not see the evil eye and hang-dog look of the animal himself? Doth he not bear himself as if he knew he were i' the presence of the governor his master hath rebelled against?"

"What is the end of this, sirrah?" demanded the count.

"The end o' it, cousin Spain, should be hemp! He hath stolen a horse, and sweareth he hath won him. He deserveth hanging, and, were I thou, gossip, I'd bid these knaves here, with harquebuses to their shoulders, swing him to the gate-arch. He hath been lying all his life, an' it were a mercy to let him hang i' his death."

"Thou art a merry knave," said the governor; "and, now it bethinks me, I have somewhat against thee. Didst thou not take service with me, and the next day run away?"

"I did fear, if I stayed with thee longer, thou

wouldst discover my wisdom, and think me a councillor in disguise, and so have me tried and shot."

"Thou art a shrewd knave. Perez," he said to the officer of the guard, "place this jester under gentle arrest until morning, and then give him his liberty. I am going forth a while, and his knowledge of my absence may work mischief. Boviedo, remain thou in the guardhouse till morning, and then go to the palace and be reinstated in thy office! Let me forth, capitano, and see that no one passes either out or in, on any pretence, during my absence. Good-evening to thee, fair jester. It grieves me to put thee under guard, but Perez hath both wine and viands to amuse thee withal, though, by'r lady! I doubt much if thou wilt find here gold or silver flagon to purloin."

With this quiet allusion to Gobin's former peccadilloes, the count sallied from the gate, and, putting spurs to his horse, was soon riding at a round rate in the direction of the forest.

SCENE THIRD.

Osma and the Chasseur Chief.

By the open window of a large vaulted apartment, situated in a lonely tower by the water-side, and on the same eve of St. Michael, leaned a tall, graceful young man, who had risen from a pallet that stood near. He was remarkable for the symmetry of his figure, and, notwithstanding a languor pervaded his whole person, also for the elegance and flexile ease of every motion of his limbs. His hair was black as the raven's wing; his eyes were large and equally black; while his complexion was remarkable for the brilliancy of the red that mingled with and redeemed the natural brown of his skin.

His features, lighted by an iron lamp that stood near him, on a projection of the rough stone wall against which he leaned, were aquiline and singularly regular

in their contour. They were noble in their shape and outline, but their expression, which marks the man more than the features upon which it is called up, was decidedly low and sensual, as if the mind that governed the face was base and wicked, and the soul that illumined it was subtle and suspicious, crafty and designing. They now wore a look of physical pain, rage, and deep mortification. One arm was suspended in a sling against his breast, while with the other he supported himself as if from bodily weakness. He was looking forth upon the water, which reflected a thousand stars in its sable mirror, seemingly another Heaven. His thoughts were not in the scene; they were ferociously brooding upon the misery of his own condition, planning vengeance and bloody retribution. Suddenly the sound of a horse galloping rapidly along the shore caused him to start, and instantly change his position so as to command the approach to the tower. Through the gloom he caught a glimpse of a man on horseback, riding at full speed towards the portal, but the next moment lost sight of him behind an angle of the building.

"If this be that false traitor De Thoyras, come to laugh again at my mutilated limb, while he bids me rise and draw sword to recover Azèlie from the Spaniard, by the blood of St. Stephen! he shall die on the threshold. It is not enough for him that he hath left me here with two miserable slaves, and, at the head of my band, gone playing the traitor by siding with this Ethiopian Renault! What excuse is it that he is only uniting against this Osma? I would rather be sworn brother with Osma against the haughty and insufferable quadroon-slave, than side with him were his sister to be the price of my alliance! There sounds the horn! If it be he, he shall die ere he can deliver the first sentence. I have yet a hand remaining that can send a bullet to a traitor's heart."

Thus speaking, he took up (with his left hand) a pistol that lay near, and, cocking it with his teeth, stood with his eye fixed upon the entrance to the hall, and

thus awaited the approach of the visiter, whom he had commanded his servant to admit. He saw at a glance that the stranger, whose face was concealed by the falling front of his hat, was not De Thoyras. To the bearing and height of the intruder, he perceived also that he was wholly a stranger. Without changing his hostile attitude nevertheless, he waited his advance to the middle of the apartment in silence; and then, in a stern and menacing tone, demanded his business.

"If thou art the young Marquis Caronde," answered the Count of Osma, firmly, and in a tone to invite confidence, "my business lies with thee."

"Deliver thy words speedily and begone, for I would be left alone," answered the young man morosely, nay, savagely, as if his whole soul was imbittered against his fellow-men on account of his degrading dismemberment.

"I pray thee, noble sir, listen to me with patience," said the count, in a bland and soothing tone of voice; "I know of thy sad loss, and—"

"May thy tongue be torn from thy throat by the foul fiend! Hast thou come hither to cast it into my teeth!"

"Nay, pardon my inadvertence; I would discourse with thee on a matter touching thine own interest, and, as I well know, thy *revenge*!"

"Out with it," cried Caronde, impatiently.

"Wouldst thou have in thy power the man who—" and the count completed his sentence with a glance at his arm.

"Would I? am I not human? Askest thou would I? Ha, ha, ha!" and he gave so demoniacal a laugh that the count stepped back appalled, and the old tower echoed with it, as if a legion of imps were mocking and deriding.

"I will give thee thy wish!"

"How?"

"Which dost thou love to gratify most, thy vengeance or thy passion?"

"Vengeance; such as I meditate on the accursed slave who hath done this—*this*!" and he tore his arm

from its sling, and thrust the mutilated stump before the eyes of the count; "who hath *thus* maimed a *Caronde*, swallows up all other feelings," he answered, with a deep and settled implacability of revenge that was horrible to contemplate, while it showed how keenly he felt his condition.

"Thou hast loved the sister of thy enemy," asserted, rather than asked, the count, venturing with caution, but yet with boldness, upon his subject.

"*Loved her!* Yes, if that be love which begot hatred, which makes the sister the instrument of revenge, and, through her infamy, makes the barb of that hatred triple-edged, and dipped in poison for the brother's soul! If *this* be love, then Jules Caronde loved the haughty sister of the quadron Renault," he said, with a laugh of derision.

Osma looked upon him with wonder while giving utterance to these sentiments, and confessed in his heart that he had found a rival in wickedness. He seemed now fully to understand with whom he had to do; and, a degree of kindred feeling inspiring him, he pursued with less embarrassment the object for which he had sought the interview.

"This is as I would have it!" he said to himself, reflectingly, but so loud as to be heard by the other.

"And who art thou that wouldst have things so!" demanded Jules, scornfully and haughtily. "Thou shouldst be a Spaniard by thy complexion and carriage."

"Answer me first, Signor Marquis, one question, and I will tell thee who I am. Wilt thou resign all claim to the affections of this Azèle for a price!"

"Am I a slave-merchant?" he fiercely demanded; "if I am poor, yet am I noble! By the bright heaven, there is a price I would sell her for, soul and body—"

"And that price is—"

"The quadron Renault!"

"He is thine!"

"Who art thou, that darest to kindle a hope thou mayst not have the power to feed with the fuel of revenge?"

"I am Garcia of Osma!" answered the count, removing his sombrero, and throwing back the folds of his mantle from his breast.

"I did half suspect that thou wert he!" said Jules, surveying him with surprise and curiosity. "There is then no mystery between us. Azèlie, rumour hath it, is to be tried on the morrow for her liberty. Had I the parchments that thou hast obtained from that female fiend Ninine, she had been my slave and mistress ere this. I need not doubt, Sir Count, what will be the result of the trial. Yet thy possession of the sister will not place the brother in my hands—*Hands? demon incarné!* does my own false tongue mock me?"

"Renault is my prisoner, in keeping for the trial!" observed the count, with a smile.

"Thine—thy prisoner?" interrogated Caronde, with the most eager interest.

"Under a close guard with the beautiful Azèlie. Both are my prisoners."

"Thou hast blessed me, count, with these tidings. Azèlie is thine so thou give me the brother!"

"He shall be placed in thy ha—I would say in thy power to-morrow, in the presence of the tribunal that transfers his sister to mine."

The young man looked an instant into the count's face with suspicion, to discover if his allusion to his lost hand had been only accidental, and, being apparently satisfied that it was, he said,

"Wouldst thou have me appear there, signor, to be the butt of scornful laughter, of finger-pointing, and nodding heads?"

"I have lost, in a most mysterious manner, noble marquis, the parchment which you heard that I received from the quadroone-mother—"

"Lost it! Then are they both *my* slaves by right of inheritance," he cried, with sudden exultation. "Vengeance will be doubly mine."

"Nay, Signor Marquis," interrupted Osma, with cutting coolness, "they are, nevertheless, in my power, not in thine! Thou canst have revenge of neither but

by my will. I am pleased to see that thou dost consider my words with patience. In desiring the possession of Azèlie, thou hast only Renault's pride and arrogance to humble! Am I right?"

"My passion for her had its birth in no other feeling."

"And this would be gratified by degrading the sister, whom the brother, as well as her own ambition, has elevated above her condition, scorning for her all beneath honourable and wedded love. Is it not so?"

"It is."

"Then, if this degradation be effected," pursued the count, "and Renault thereby humbled, it will matter little to thee who is the instrument of it. I swear to thee thou shalt have thy desire in the result. Wilt thou give me the sister for the brother?"

"Hast thou not said that thou hast her already, Sir Count, as well as the brother? Wherefore do you put an empty question to me?"

"It hath this end," answered Osma, coming closer to him; "the loss of the parchment leaves me no ground for claiming them as my slaves, save by an open act of power and will. This I do not wish to exercise in the present state of popular feeling, if I may bring it about otherwise. Without doubt, Signor Marquis, the title rests in you from the neglect of your noble father to record the manumission. It is through yourself, therefore, that I would have the title come to me."

"Darest thou insult me, Sir Count of Osma, with the proposition to use me as a tool of thy lust?"

"Am I not made a tool of thy vengeance?" demanded the wily Spaniard.

"Be it so," answered Jules, after a moment's gaze at the collected face of the count; "and here is my—*Sceleret!* the incarnate fiend hath my tongue," he cried, with a torrent of fearful execrations, hastily withdrawing the mutilated stump, which he had involuntarily and impulsively extended to seal the compact.

The Count of Osma smiled with malicious pleasure.

Then, saying that he would immediately despatch a party of horse to escort him to the city and to his palace before midnight, he took his leave of the young man, and was soon galloping with an exulting spirit on his return to the town.

If Jules Caronde had entertained any other feelings than those of deadly revenge against him who had so terribly mutilated him, a revenge grafted upon years of previous hatred, he would have borne himself with the hostile bearing of an enemy towards the new governor on discovering him in the person of his visiter ; or, in promising to enter the city, and place himself in his power after the slaughter of his ambassador and his body-guard, he would, at least, have apprehended treachery and retribution. But he had no room for any emotion or thought but that which so completely filled his dark and bitter soul.

SCENE FOURTH.

The Camanchee Prince and Courreur Chef.

About the same time that Jules Caronde rose from his restless pallet to gaze from the window upon the quiet lake, so contrasted in its stillness and repose to the unquiet of his own bosom, a young man made his appearance in a turret upon the outer wall of the island-fortress of the *courreurs du bois*, which was situated a league to the north of the lonely tower of the chasseur chief, in the centre of a broader link of the same chain of lagoons. His glance was directed towards the northern outlet of the lake, which, through a succession of others, ultimately gave egress into the Mississippi many leagues distant. He listened as if he expected to hear distant sounds from the water, and, with a night-telescope, surveyed, long and intensely, the lengthened "reach" beyond him. A sound at length arrested his ear. He listened doubtfully a while, and then spoke to a sentinel near.

"Didst thou not hear a sound, like the dashing of paddles, or the steady rush of barges through the water?"

"I have heard it often to-night, *Sieur De Thoyras*," answered the man; "it is the evening wind bending the tops of the forest trees on the main as it passes over them. There, it ripples along the smooth water; and now I feel it!"

"You are right, *Leroy*!" answered the young man, with a tone of disappointment, as the wind blew his locks about his cheeks.

At this moment *Charleval* joined him.

"If you look up the lake until dawn, *De Thoyras*, you will not see your allies. A thousand *Camanchee* mounted warriors will scarce row when they can ride."

"The same pirogues that will take them to this side, will easily enter the inlet to the first of the chain of lakes, and so reach us with less distance. It is twenty leagues farther by the shores; and, as the runner *Lassatchee*, on his return, bade us look for them to-night, they will, to get here in time, take water. If they disappoint us, we must be sacrificed along with *Renault* to-morrow, or rescue him."

"Did I not tell thee I had once seen this noble *Camanchee* chief, and also the young prince his son," observed *Charleval*. "Mark me! He will not disappoint us! When, three years ago, he heard that the Count of *Osma* had arrived to govern the province under Spain, he came from his fastnesses, accompanied by several of his chiefs and by his son, a princely youth, and in the most distinct terms offered his services against the Spaniard should he again return. Since that period he has kept himself in readiness to obey our call. From some cause, hostility to Spain is deeply rooted in his breast. He will not disappoint us. *Lassatchee* reports that he received the message of the arrival of the Spaniards with a kindling eye; and, forthwith gathering his warriors, bade him return, and say that he would not be long behind him."

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When they came here before it was by land, swimming the river on horseback. The Camanchee, like the Arab of the desert, is ever in the saddle, and it will not be a slight reason that will induce him to exchange his horse for a barge. Listen ! That was a horse's neigh from the main land ! Carondelet and Marigny, thy two penitent *frères*, De Thoyras, who seek to atone, by the most vigilant duty now, for their folly in being led astray by Jules, I have posted on the shore ; Marigny's bugle will give us the signal of their approach."

"Hark !" cried De Thoyras, catching him by the arm.

"And there it sounds, the sweetest music ears ever listened to," continued Charleval, with gratitude and triumph. "Now, Osma, is the day of thy power ended."

Ere the notes of the glad bugle which was sounded from the land ceased to float across the lake, Charleval sent back an answering blast that awakened a thousand echoes from the wooded shores, and caused five hundred hearts within the fortress to bound with warlike enthusiasm.

Instantly the whole island-garrison was in life and motion. Charleval, now the *chef courrier* in Renault's place, leaving De Thoyras in command, sprang into a barge, accompanied by the three remaining *frères* that had followed De Thoyras to Renault's standard, and whom he had made his lieutenants, and crossed the lake to the main to meet his allies.

As he left the island, the diminished moon, with tardy rising, at length appeared above the trees of the forest, and, as he approached the shadowy line of the shore, began to illumine its recesses and penetrate aslant into its glades. Standing upright in his barge, with his keen gaze fixed on the gloomy banks, he was borne towards them with rapid oars. All was still and motionless along the land ; and, as he came nearer, he began to fear his joy was premature, and that Marigny had been deceived. At this moment he dis-

covered a man on the beach awaiting his landing, and with a beating heart he sprang to the shore to meet him.

"What tidings, Carondelet? Are they not arrived?"

"Look along the curving edge of the forest, which, receding, leaves a wide lawn between it and the lake," said the young man, the elegance of whose figure was finely set off by the richness of the chasseur costume which he wore, conducting him, at the same time, to a small mound, upon which grew a gigantic and wide-spreading oak.

"I see nothing."

"Dost thou hear nothing?"

"No."

"Yet there are more than a thousand mounted warriors lining it. Come with me, Charleval," he added, laying his hand lightly upon the wrist of his young friend. "Their leader hath just marshalled them there in covert, as is the practice of these forest warriors; and now, surrounded by his stately chiefs, awaits your coming in yonder spot where the moonlight is falling like silver mist upon the sward."

Charleval followed the poetic Carondelet from the water, and, crossing the edge of the forest, came suddenly upon the left of a line of savage warriors hid within its shades. Passing in silence along their front, not without admiration at the barbaric splendour of their costume and the fierceness of their aspects, he came to a space in the centre of the wood all open to the sky, save that a sycamore, towering from the midst, flung above its hoary arms, between which the moon made its way in many a broken beam of light. Beneath the branches of this tree Charleval discovered a group of savage warriors, plumed and painted, and arrayed in the gorgeous costumes of the chiefs of the Camanchees, to which his eye was familiar. They were mounted on fiery horses richly caparisoned; the skins of wild beasts, that constituted their housings, dyed scarlet and orange; while gold and silver orna-

ments profusely adorned their bridles, stirrups, and saddle-bows.

They were seven in number, armed with battle-axes; and five of them, in addition, carried long-feathered spears in their hands. The latter were drawn up in stern silence a few feet in the rear of the remaining two, as if they formed a guard of honour to their prince rather than constituted a part of his council. The chief himself, distinguished by his noble and kingly bearing, as well as the war-eagle's feather that adorned the coronet of barbaric gold, was seated in his saddle, with his face turned towards Charleval, who had paused to view his countenance ere he proceeded. The light of the moon shone full upon it, and betrayed distinctly each lineament, while it, at the same time, softened the harsher outlines. It was that of a man nearly sixty years of age. The features were noble, and he thought of that haughty Castilian character which he had observed in Spanish nobles of high birth. Benevolence and firmness pleasingly marked the expression of his well-shaped mouth, and a smile of great sweetness animated his face as he slightly turned his head to reply to some remark made by the young chief at his side, in whom Charleval recognised his son. There was a seriousness stamped on his brow by care and years till it had assumed the fixed impression of sternness, to which the bronzed complexion and the warlike garniture of his temples gave additional severity. Charleval read in his face the preponderance of the more humane and gentle qualities of mankind over the savage and vindictive. His carriage was marked by an air of commanding dignity, that became the native majesty of his whole person.

About his neck was a circlet of plain gold, small chains of silver, and an imposing and barbarous necklace, composed of talons of eagles and the glittering claws of beasts of prey: the records of his own personal achievements in the savage chase. He wore a sort of surcoat without sleeves, made of the glossy skin of the panther, bound to his body by a belt of hide fastened with

a rude clasp of virgin gold. His leggins were of orange-coloured deer's hide, highly ornamented, with sandals of the same, elegantly and tastefully wrought with brilliant beadwork, and his shirt was of mountain goat-skin. Over his shoulders was worn a scarlet mantle or *ponta*, which fell in graceful folds about his person. It was garnished with quills of the porcupine, and bordered with the long hair of human scalps. His stirrups were of solid gold, and his bridle was plated with the same precious metal. In his hand he held a shining battle-axe, which, with a broad two-edged dagger stuck in his belt, comprised his arms.

The young chief, his son, was mounted on a black horse of great firmness of limb and matchless beauty of proportion, whose fiery impatience he could hardly restrain, yet governing him with that careless indifference of touch (beneath which is concealed the mastery of skill) characteristic of a man to whom the saddle is a familiar seat. He was not more than seventeen years of age, yet tall and graceful; shaped like a youthful Apollo, remarkable for the natural ease of his carriage, and the unstudied grace of all his movements. His eye was bright and fearless; his brow open and ingenuous; and the expression of his face, which was dark but handsome, was resolute and fearless. A circlet of the plumes of the war-eagle bound his brows, ornamented with the beak of the kingly bird placed in front, like the visor to a helm. His black hair was braided, and hung in long plaits to his saddle, the ends tied with gay cords of silver thread and tassels. Over his shoulder was thrown the skin of a young buffalo-bull; and on the soft, white texture of the dressed hide, which served as an ornamental lining of the shaggy hide, and of which he ostentatiously displayed outwardly as much as could appear, were painted or emblazoned in scarlet colours the battles in which, young as he was, he had already distinguished himself. His leggins were of the same gay colours; while gaitermoccasins of exceedingly beautiful workmanship covered his feet and legs. His breast was ornamented

with gold and silver ornaments, and savage necklaces of birds and tiger's claws ; while on his breast hung a circular shield made of the skin of the bull's neck, on which were blazoned, singularly enough, the crest of the house of Osma, as if the young warrior would defy the Spanish chief on the morrow by the open appropriation of his own arms. A quiver and a short bow were slung at his back ; in his belt was stuck a long dagger ; and, like his sire, he carried in his right hand a naked battle-axe. Near him stood the young *chasseur* Marigny.

"Ihuahua ! the young *courreur* leader is here," said Carondelet, advancing, and addressing the elder chief.

"On foot ?" exclaimed the prince, in French, courteously dismounting with native politeness ; and, throwing the rein of his horse to his son, he walked forward to meet Charleval.

The young man received him with that warmth of grateful feeling which his prompt coming had inspired. Then, without losing for him that reverence his age and commanding presence, as well as his powerful rank challenged, he entered immediately into the subject of the alliance.

"Hast thou seen this Count Osma ?" inquired the Camanche warrior, after Charleval had given him, in answer to question upon question (as if the minutest detail was to him of the deepest moment), a full and connected narrative of the circumstances that had transpired within his knowledge, from the night of the landing of the Spaniards to that moment ; to all of which he had listened with stern and wondering attention.

"I have not seen him, Ihuahua. Yet men say he hath a noble countenance, and looks less the villain than he is," answered Charleval.

"Hath he a daughter who is fair and virtuous, said you ?"

"Gentle and lovely above her sex, rumour has it."

"'Tis a pity ; I would it were not so," observed

the warrior, with some emotion. "Hath he grown gray?"

"The count?"

"Yes, this *count*," he repeated, with a strong ironical emphasis on the last word.

"I have not yet seen him, prince!" answered Charleval.

"Ah! no—no, thou hast not," he answered, abstractedly, and then gave himself up to musing.

Charleval noticed his manner with surprise; but, not being able to account for it to his satisfaction, entered into conversation with the young prince, who spoke French like a native, until the father should rouse himself from his deep thought and again address him. Suddenly Ihuahua turned to him and said, in a commanding tone,

"Conduct me to thy fortress! I would pass the night with thee. My warriors shall encamp here on the main, and with the dawn be ready to move towards the town. My son Opelouza will accompany me. These chiefs will also remain with my warriors."

Thus speaking, and giving a few orders to his chiefs in their own martial tongue, the dignified warrior, accompanied by his son, both leaving their horses in the charge of their men, followed Charleval to the beach, and, entering the boat with him, were rapidly borne across the lake to the fortress.

SCENE FIFTH.

The Sorceress and the Quadroone-mother.

ON the same eventful eve of St. Michael, ere yet the moon had risen, the beautiful yet wicked quadroone-mother sat alone by the trellised casement of her chamber. The gentle airs from the garden, into which it opened, came to her through the open lattice laden

with fragrance, and cooled her throbbing temples. Her brow was as queenly, her noble black eye as large and lustrous, and her dark, majestic, yet voluptuous beauty still as striking as before. Yet thought was busy as she leaned musingly upon her arm and looked vacantly into the deep blue of the starry heaven. But her thoughts were not in the direction of her gaze. She had taken her seat by the window as twilight stole over the scene, and insensibly became meditative. Her thoughts, as at that hour they irresistibly will, soon took a sad and serious complexion, and, ere she was aware, she found herself acting over again in imagination the deeds of her guilty life.

She had other cause, too, for sad and gloomy reveries. Renault had cast off the filial reverence which had hitherto so distinguished him ; and, though a prisoner in his own house, and daily in her presence, treated her with cold and stern indifference ; within the hour she had encountered his silent, reproving, yet contemptuous glance as he passed in and out of her apartment. Azèlie, too, shuddered at her approach, and avoided her.

Both, indeed, had kept aloof from her during the six days of their imprisonment, not only to express thereby their feelings at her criminal compact with Osma, but to enjoy each other's society sacred from her intrusion. The safety of the concealed Don Henrique, as well as the privacy of Estelle's disguised visits to their little circle, also rendered such retirement necessary. This neglect, by throwing her upon herself and her own resources, naturally produced in her a morose and bitter spirit, and at times a melancholy that she would gladly have banished. She was a guilty woman ; and the angel of sadness, which to the good and virtuous is the parent of gentle devotion, to the bad and vicious becomes the author of guilty fears, that fill the remorseful mind with dismal contemplations of its present state, and offer it dark and menacing pictures of the future. As she sat and reflected, her soul was filled with forebodings she could not shake off. Thought maddened her.

She remembered, with singular distinctness, among other reminiscences that forced themselves upon her, an event of years long passed, as if it had taken place but yesterday. The more she strove to divest her mind of this unpleasant current of thought, the more perseveringly would it flow on again in the same channel, gathering fresh impetus from the temporary diversion of its course ; till at length, giving way to it, she experienced a despairing pleasure in indulging the dark and turbid torrent to its full bent. She remembered the time—the hour—the place ! Twenty-three years had passed away, yet the whole was written in fadeless letters of undying memory upon her mind. She was then young—beautiful—a favoured mistress ! The Marquis de la Caronde adored her, and lavished upon her the wealth of his heart and his hand. The Marchioness of Caronde wore only his name. Ninine held the gords of his will, and governed him as her caprice pointed. At length the marchioness became a mother, and the marquis, from paternal pride, paid to her who had given an heir to his house the respect that his love had hitherto denied her. Ninine felt the neglect and jealousy that now first poisoned her love. Thrice she attempted the infant boy's life, and thrice the marquis detected, yet forgave her ; for the child was not many weeks old ere he yielded himself again captive to her fascinations. A fourth time, when the boy was half a year old, the shaft was aimed at the fountain of its nourishment : the subtlest poison that is was conveyed to the mother in a rose-bud ! With the opening flower, she inhaled the invisible principle of death. Like that flower, she faded and soon died. But the boy lived. The father's suspicions were aroused, and he removed him secretly to a foster-mother. Yet his love for the siren who had thrown about him her fatal net was stronger than his horror at the crime. In vain she set on foot every secret inquiry. She was unable to discover the infant ; and, in a few months afterward, becoming herself a mother, in the joy of that event forgot the cause of her disquiet.

But ambition soon enthroned itself in her soul. She now aspired to the title and estates of the father for her illegitimate son. Her hatred to the true heir was again revived, and she gave herself no rest, night or day, in her desire to discover his retreat. At length—for what will not jealousy, envy, and ambition, united in a woman's heart, accomplish?—when her own boy was two years old, she discovered the object of her search, now a fine child nearly three years of age. It was found by one of her hirelings many leagues in the interior. She had him secretly brought to her. The two boys were wonderfully like each other, both bearing their father's looks. Hers, being tall for its age, although nearly a year younger, was equal with the other in height. Suddenly this resemblance suggested a thought upon which she immediately acted. The box of poisoned sweetmeats she had prepared to give the child was cast aside, and, drawing it to her, she taught it to call her "Ma." Her own son she sent back to the hamlet in his stead, knowing that the marquis had not seen his child for a year, and would easily be deceived by the likeness between the two, while the alteration that he would discover when he should visit him would be attributed to the natural effect of time and growth; and, lest the face of the other should betray her, she guardedly kept him out of his sight until she could present him without suspicion. At length, satisfied, from her manner (studied to bring about this very result, and establish, without farther uncertainty, her object), that Ninine would not harm him, he sent for the son of the marchioness, now four years of age, and received to his arms instead that of the quadroone.

Such was the field over which the quadroone-mother's thoughts ranged as she sat by the window. She had often sighed; but it was because she did not find the fulfilment of her ambitious hopes in her son a reward sufficient to compensate her for her guilt.

With the embrace with which he received the child, the marquis had detected the deception she had put

upon him. But he remained silent upon the subject, though she suspected his knowledge of it even up to the day of his death. But, so long as he winked at her wickedness, which he did, perhaps, either from fear of her poisoning the true heir, or on account of the blindness of his attachment to her, she paid no regard to his knowledge of it, and, with a feeling of security in her guilt, continued to feed ambitious hopes for her son ; and thus, until the day of their father's death, did these two brothers grow up to manhood, nature alone making the just distinction between the base coin and that which was of the legitimate ore.

The thoughts of the quadroone-mother still flowed on, downward the tide of time, and unsparing memory again held the mirror of the past to her mental gaze.

She remembered that, fourteen years before, she was walking through the slave-mart, when a beautiful female child, scarcely three years old, held in the lap of a tall, stern woman, arrested her eye ; that, pleased with its infantine beauty, she purchased both mother and child, and took them to her dwelling. That, at length, as the child grew in beauty, she conceived the thought of adopting it as her own, and by the refinements of education fitting her to be the companion even of princes ; so that, through her promised loveliness, when her own charms and power should fail, and her favour with the marquis be diminished, she might live again in her *protégée*, and by her powerful alliance hold the consideration and rank her ambition coveted. She remembered how the child's mother doted upon it ; how she refused to resign it from her own devoted care to hers ; and how, fearing her for a secret power she possessed over her mind, she at length gave her to drink of an herb, the property of which is to drive those who take it to seek self-destruction in the water.

As Ninine recalled the wild shrieks of the woman rushing forth at midnight to plunge into the river, they seemed to come again with startling distinctness to her

ears ; shuddering, she stopped them and hid her eyes, as if to shut out from every sense the fearful curse upon the murderess with which her victim's last cries were mingled. But in vain. The curse was repeated sterner and closer to her ear, as uttered by a living voice. She looked up. 'Twas not imagination !

It was real ! The murdered woman stood before her, and a deep and solemn curse, thrice repeated, as she heard it fourteen years before, fell from her lips. The murderess gazed upon this appearance from the dead with mortal horror in her glazed stare, with parted lips, and with the fixed and rigid immobility of stone.

The sorceress stood contemplating her a moment with a steady look of contempt, and a triumphant smile in her eyes, which showed it to be a moment of the most gratifying exultation to her. At length she spoke :

" Woman, dost thou remember me ?"

Ninine slowly brought her hands together, and clasped the fingers supplicatingly ; then sinking to her knees with a pallid countenance, in which awe, and fear, and remorse were blended, twice in vain essayed to move her bloodless lips in reply.

" What hast thou done with her I left with thee ?" demanded the sorceress, in a stern voice.

" She—she is—is here !" faintly articulated Ninine.

" She is thine !"

" Thou wicked woman ! I know thy guilt and thy acts of iniquity, and have watched over the child thou wouldst have made the victim of, thy ambitious heart ! Repent thee of thy crimes, for thy hour is near !"

" Mercy, mercy, dread being !"

" Didst thou remember mercy when the maiden pleaded to thee ?" demanded the sorceress, with reproving sternness.

" Mercy, mercy ! thou spirit of another world !" she repeated, with unsubdued terror.

" Be thou in the hall of trial on the morrow to answer truly what may be required of thee, and thou mayst have space for repentance."

"I will answer even to my own hurt, if thou wilt give me hope of mercy in Heaven!"

"Mercy in Heaven ask thy priests for," she answered, derisively. "Mercy on earth I alone promise thee."

"This will give me space for obtaining Heaven's; I will obey thee."

"Know that thou art there to assert thine own dishonour. Wilt thou go?"

"I will."

"To publish thine own infamy! Wilt thou go?"

"I will, dread being!"

"Then farewell till we meet in the Judgment Hall."

With this parting salutation, spoken in a warning tone of voice, the sorceress disappeared as suddenly as she had appeared, and left the quadroone-mother to reflect upon an event which, to her guilty and superstitious soul, seemed to have been directed by the anger of an avenging Heaven, and portended sudden and just retribution. That she had seen an inhabitant of the world of spirits was the deep and abiding impression upon her mind, already by its previous train of thought fully open to the reception of supernatural influences.

CHAPTER XV.

ST. MICHAEL'S DAY.—SCENE IN THE JUDGMENT HALL.

THE sun rose on the morning of St. Michael's day with unclouded splendour, kindling a thousand steel points that bristled in the Place d'Armes, and dying with deeper red the crimson banners of Spain, which, bordered with gold, and gay with silken fringes, flaunted above the heads of squadrons of cuirassiers and lancers, and long lines of heavy men-at-arms. The whole Spanish force was under arms, and in battle array before the hall of council. The Count of Osma, in the magnificent uniform of commanding-general,

mounted on his sable warhorse, and accompanied by all his staff and aids save Montejo, rode along their line with a proud eye and triumphant bearing. It was near the hour for the sitting of the tribunal; and, as he galloped across the Place d'Armes, reviewing his troops with the pride of a soldier, he was weighing in his mind the chances of an attack upon them from the citizens, who, as the time of the trial approached, began to evince a deep and ominous feeling of sympathy for the prisoners, which he felt was not to be slighted.

All the streets of the city seemed to have disgorged their throngs into the square. It was on every side surrounded with a dense multitude of citizens waiting the hour of trial, and only kept back from the council-chamber by the presence of the military, and a strong guard placed at every avenue of approach. It was Osma's hour of triumph. The calm and settled vindictiveness of his looks betrayed his consciousness that he held his own judgment in his own hands, while the scorn with which he surveyed the imposing display he had made for the trial told that he felt it was to be but a masquerade of justice, and that he looked upon the whole as an amusing pageant, to which he had consented to gratify his vanity and manifest his power, while it should make more signal and public the degradation and infamy both of Renault and Azélie.

At ten o'clock the roar of artillery announced the opening of the tribunal; and Osma, with his aids and chief officers, dismounting from their horses, entered the government-house and ascended to the Hall of Council. With a haughty port, he preceded them through files of men-at-arms; and, entering the chamber of the tribunal by a side door, advanced towards the forum where sat the six judges in their sable robes and badges of office. He took a seat upon a sort of state chair on the right of it, yet so much lower that he seemed rather a spectator than an actor in the coming scene. The Moor stood like a statue behind him, and Estelle, with anxious solicitude, trembling between

hope and fear, sat by his side. In a few moments after he was seated, the wide doors of the hall were thrown open, and the populace, rushing in, soon filled the vast chamber to overflowing.

Reggio, the *alfarez real*, and one of the members of the *cabildo*, was its president. After a deep and expectant silence had prevailed over the hall for a few seconds, he rose, and proclaiming, in a loud voice, the object of the extraordinary sitting of the tribunal, commanded the accuser to stand forth and be confronted with the accused.

The Count of Osma rose from his chair with a derisive smile of conscious power, and was about to advance to the front of the tribunal, when his glance rested on the advancing figure of the sorceress, who, with her eyes fixed upon him, was making her rapid way across the space between the tribunal and the door in the direction of the spot where he stood. Before he could give utterance to any command in relation to her, she was already at his side, and had whispered in his ear, in a low tone,

"There be two Indian warriors without, a chief and his son, accompanied by a young man, who would witness the trial, an' it please my Lord of Osma," she said, rather imperatively than as if seeking a favour.

"Let them enter and stand near the forum," he answered, in a loud voice. "This is no private matter; 'tis not the first trial on record a master hath had to prove his right to his own slaves. Know, citizens, I have consented to this from my love of justice and respect for the laws."

In a few seconds she reappeared, conducting the stately warrior Ihuahua, the prince his son, and Charleval, who, save a sword at his side, was in the dress of a creole citizen. When the emotion excited by the sudden appearance of this party had subsided, and they had taken a place near the tribunal opposite to Osma, Reggio again called upon the accuser and accused to stand before the forum. Osma, with dignified ease, advanced in front of the judgment seat, the eye of the

warrior chief the while fixed upon him with an eagle-like and searching glance. At the same instant, from one of the long Venetian windows that opened upon the corridor, guarded by a file of Spanish soldiers, appeared Renault, with Azèlie supported upon his arm. His carriage was haughty and calm, and as he met the eye of Osma his own flashed back defiance. Azèlie was pale, yet firm; and from the serene yet devotional aspect of her countenance, and the repose of her manner, it would seem she had a hope to sustain her above despair even in that fearful hour. After a moment's silence, the judge, turning to the count, asked,

"Dost thou claim the prisoners here arraigned as thy slaves?"

"I do," answered he, boldly.

"On what legal ground?" demanded Reggio, looking at the people while he spoke rather than at the count, as if he was willing that they should see how bold justice could be, even with so high a party at its bar.

"On that of a deed of manumission, signors, given to their mother by the Marquis of Caronde, which, not being recorded in the public archives, but placed by him instead in the freed woman's hands who had been his slave, gave her the power over her own liberty and that of her issue. This parchment has been transferred to me by the mother, and with it the surrender of her own freedom and that of her children."

Renault smiled haughtily while the count was speaking, who, on his part, with malicious pleasure, secretly marked his confident demeanour, supposing it to be grounded on his knowledge of the loss of the parchment to which he alluded, only the lower to sink his hopes when he should find the equivalent resource he had at command.

"Produce this instrument, my lord," said Reggio.

"He may not, Sieur Reggio," said Renault, taking a folded parchment from his breast, and holding it unrolled before the tribunal. "This is the instrument of my sister's liberty and my own, on which our accuser

would found our servitude ; and *thus* do I make myself and her for ever free."

With these energetic words he rent the paper in fragments and cast them at his feet. A murmur of surprise and pleasure ran through the multitude, which Osma, with a voice of thunder, silenced by calling on the *alguazil mayor*, who had ushered in the prisoners, to "lead in Jules, marquis of Caronde." Renault's heart leaped to his throat, and Azèlie could scarcely repress a shriek at this command.

In the midst of breathless expectancy, the chasseur chief, pale and invalid, with his right arm in a sling, entered the hall and sat down in a chair to which Osma conducted him, placed near his own.

"There is yet one other—the quadroone-mother!" said the count, turning to Reggio ; and Ninine, with looks that showed she had not forgotten her visit from the sorceress, while she obeyed the command of Osma, who had summoned her to attend in order to confront Jules before the tribunal, was led in by the *alguazil mayor*.

"Now, signors," said the count to Reggio and the judges, "first question this woman of this parchment."

"Wert thou once the slave of the Marquis of Caronde?" asked Reggio, with courtesy, playing subtly his given part in the trial.

"Yes," she answered, without lifting her eyes, and with so much embarrassment that Osma glanced towards her sharply, as if he expected her to commit herself in some way. But she thought not of him or his interests now. The fear of what was to follow from the threats of the sorceress alone occupied her mind.

"Did he draw, and then sign and seal for thee a bill of manumission for thyself and children?"

"He did, signor."

"Did he record it?"

"He gave it to me, signor."

"Didst thou file it in the archives?"

"No, I kept it, signor."

"And afterward transferred it to the Count of Osma—was it not so?"

"I did, signor."

"Thou and thy children are then his slaves by this act?"

"My children alone, signor. I have been manumitted by another instrument under his hand and seal."

"Thou dost acknowledge, then, thy son Renault and thy daughter Azèlie to be the slaves of the Lord of Osma?"

"I do, signor," she said, at first hesitating, but instantly answering on meeting the fixed glance of Osma.

"Now, Signor Reggio," said the count, with a smile, addressing the judges, "having shown your tribunal that I had once a clear and lawful right to hold the prisoners in bondage, and all present having witnessed the destruction of the instrument on which alone I founded this right, it remains that the prisoners be acquitted as freed man and freed woman, unless, by a claim equally well-grounded, I can a second time prove my right to their servitude."

To these words Renault and Azèlie listened, now with hope when he mentioned acquittal, then with poignant despair when he alluded to a new ground on which to base his claim to hold them in bondage. They instinctively cast their eyes towards the implacable Jules, in whose fierce countenance they too plainly read the solution of Osma's words, and divined the instrument through which he was a second time to aim at their freedom.

"This argument is conclusive," said Reggio. "If you have farther evidence to substantiate your claim, my lord, may it please you to produce it."

"I pray you, my lord marquis," said Osma, addressing Jules, "present your claim before the tribunal."

Jules rose, and, supporting himself with his remaining hand on the arm of the chair, said in a low tone, that was expressive of the bitter vindictiveness which had brought him to the hall of judgment,

"Signors, as the only son and heir to the title and

French estates of the late Marquis of Caronde, and in absence of any evidence to prove the manumission of the prisoners Renault and Azèlie, I hereby claim them as my slaves by virtue of my father's purchase of the mother, and according to the letter and spirit of our laws. Last night I discovered among his papers this bill of sale, dated twenty-three years back, of the quadroone Ninine, properly attested and sealed, which will prove my claim."

With these words he presented a paper to Reggio, who, after examining and returning it to him, said, as if surprised at this turn of the trial,

"This instrument, my lord marquis, confirms your right beyond dispute."

"This right, then," said Jules, "I here transfer to the Lord of Osma!"

With these words he placed the paper in the hands of the count, and turning, with a hideous smile of anticipated vengeance, his vindictive glance towards Renault, sat down again, wearied with the effort he had made.

Renault listened to the statement of his deadly foe with growing horror, and heard the decision of the *Alfarez real* as if a thunderbolt had burst upon his head. But he felt not for himself. Azèlie had sunk upon her knees beside him, and was looking pleadingly, eloquently, and imploringly up into his face. He knew what she meant. He knew that all hope was past; yet he could not—he *could not strike the blow!* His hand was in his bosom upon a dagger which he had concealed there—but he could not *draw it!* Osma now advanced towards them with the confident and exulting step of triumphant wickedness. The crisis was imminent. The weapon was half drawn from its covert, when the sorceress, who had been seemingly an unconcerned spectatress of all that had passed, stepped between the count and his victims.

"Stand there! Garcia Ramirez," she cried, commandingly. "Renault, hold thy hand. My-lords judg-

es ! I have evidence to bring in this matter. Woman," she added, addressing the trembling Ninine, and speaking in a commanding tone, that filled the house and thrilled the blood of all who heard it, "now give thy testimony, in truth, as thou hopest for mercy and fearest retribution !"

Ninine fell upon her face before the tribunal, and clasped her hands in despair, yet deprecatingly.

"Is this young man thy son ? Speak truth, as thou hopest for salvation !" cried the sorceress, laying her hand upon Renault.

"No. He is the son of the Marchioness of Ca-ronde."

"Is yonder young man thy son ?" she demanded, pointing to Jules, who had already sprung to his feet.

"He is, dread being !"

"And thou didst transpose the one for the other in their childhood, and thus deceive the Marquis of Ca-ronde ? Speak truth !"

"I did," answered Ninine, irresistibly, wholly overcome at this wonderful knowledge of a secret which she had believed locked in her own bosom, not knowing that her thoughts were audible as she sat at her casement the evening before.

"'Tis false !" shouted Jules ; and, in the fierceness of his indignant rage, he bounded towards her, seeking, with his mutilated arm, the grasp of a sword-hilt at his side.

Instantly recalled to the loss of his hand, he uttered a volley of curses ; and, maddened even more than by the disclosure of Ninine, he literally stamped and foamed with fury at this abortive attempt to grasp his sword. Even Osma, though at such a moment, could not forbear giving him a look of malicious pleasure.

"Here's a hand to help thee, gossip Jules !" cried the shrill voice of Gobin ; and, with the words, a withered human hand fell upon the floor at the phrensied creole's feet.

He turned deadlly pale, and, staggering backward,

was compelled to support himself by the balustrade of the tribunal.

"What means this, signora?" asked the count of the quadroone-mother, with stern surprise.

"That I speak the truth, my lord."

"She but seeks to make her bastard son noble, my lords and judges," cried Jules, with deep wrath, turning to the tribunal. "There is no proof, my lords!"

While he was speaking, there was heard a general exclamation of surprise from the populace, occasioned by the entrance of the venerable Father Dagobert, vicar-general of the province, in his full and flowing canonical robes, who, with great dignity, slowly advanced towards the tribunal. The judges rose at his approach, and even Osma and Jules Caronde felt awed at his presence. He was accompanied by two Carmelite monks, in their tawny-coloured scapulars of serge, with girdles and sandals.

"My lord vicar, I did leave thee in Cuba a month since," said Osma, courteously; "I welcome thee back."

"My lords and judges," said the vicar-general, after the excitement caused by his presence had in a degree subsided, "I have intruded into this court to bear testimony to the evidence already delivered by this quadroone woman, which I have listened to from the ante-room!"

"Does your reverence mean to prove that she hath spoken truth?" asked Reggio, with astonishment.

"Hear my testimony, and judge! When I was on the eve of embarking for Cuba, the late Marquis of Caronde, being on his deathbed, sent for me to confess and give him absolution. In his confession, he declared, by his hopes of Divine mercy, that the young man called Renault the Quadroon was his legitimate son by the marchioness his wife, and the young man, known as Jules Caronde, was his son by the quadroone Ninine."

"'Tis a foul lie, lord vicar!" cried Jules.

There was a general murmur of pious horror at this

impious assertion, while Reggio and the judges started from their seats with astonishment.

"Nay, son, thou hast forgotten thyself," said Father Dagobert, mildly. "This is to thee a bitter truth!"

"I challenge proof!" demanded the degraded young man. "St. Peter himself should not prove this damning charge on his own assertion!"

"I forgive thee, my son, for thou hast reason for bitterness. The sin be with those who have done this thing," said the vicar-general, looking sternly at Ninine, who knelt in silence and despair before the tribunal.

With these words he drew from the folds of his vesture a sealed parchment. Then addressing the judges, he continued,

"In the midst of my lord marquis's confession, respected signors, he took from his pillow this paper, sealed with his own private signet, and, saying that it was a full confession, under his own hand, of his being a party to such great injustice, desired me to make such use of it for the advantage of the true heir as, with reverence for his own memory, I should see fit; taking from me, at the same time, a most solemn promise to see his son restored to his hereditary right. The ship that was to bear me to Cuba was already under sail, and I hastened on board. I returned but half an hour since in a barque that hath arrived from the Havana; and, hearing of this trial, hastened hither to save the innocent and confound the guilty."

Reggio received the packet, and, examining the seals, held it towards Jules, on whose finger was his father's signet with which the impression on the wax had been made, and demanded if that was his father's seal. The young man was silent from conviction; and Reggio, at the command of the vicar-general, broke the three seals, and read aloud the confession, written in his own hand, of the marquis, to the facts stated by the vicar-general. After accusing Ninine the Quadroone of the guilty acts charged to her, he

prayed that, although, through a criminal weakness, he could not bring himself to punish her, he trusted she would be brought by a just tribunal to the punishment her crimes merited.

"There remains now," said Reggio, after the surprise created by the reading of his confession had subsided, "two points to be made clear. The first is, the authenticity of the handwriting; and the second, the truth of the confession of the accused party, Ninine. Is this your father's handwriting?" he demanded of Jules.

The young man made no reply; but its genuineness was proved by comparison, in addition to the testimony of the vicar-general, with other authentic instruments written with his own hand. "Art thou guilty of the charge of which thy late lord and master hath charged thee?" he then demanded of Ninine.

"Guilty," she gasped rather than articulated.

"Dost thou swear, in the presence of Heaven, that Renault the Quadroon is the son of the Marchioness Caronde?"

"I swear."

"Dost thou swear, in the presence of Heaven, that Jules, known as the Marquis of Caronde, is thine own son?"

"I do."

"My Lord of Osma," said Reggio, with the decision and coolness he had exhibited to the count throughout, and whom he had made to feel that himself was judge there, and not he, "this seems the clearest testimony. Have you aught to say against it?"

"Nothing, so that it bear not against the maiden, though by it I lose a slave; and," he added, ironically, turning to Jules, "my friend here a marquisate."

"Dost thou mock me?" demanded Jules, fiercely.

"Nay, being thy mother's son, thou art my slave, and I cannot mock thee," answered Osma, with derision, exulting with the malice of a bad man in the wretchedness of his late partner in guilt.

"Thy slave, proud count! Neither is thy slave!"

cried the sorceress, sternly. "Jules Caronde, behold thy master!" she commandingly added, pointing to Renault.

Jules ground his teeth, and the count, with a laugh, turned on his heel, while the sorceress, with her withered finger still stretched towards Renault, kept her full eye upon the writhing features of the chasseur chief.

Renault had heard the testimony of the vicar-general, listened to the reading of the confession and to the subsequent opinion of the judges, with silent amazement and incredulity, which each moment gave way to the full head of proof that met his doubts: doubts not because the evidence was weak, but that the truth was too great for his belief. At length he felt the confirmation of his true position, and with proud and grateful feelings bent over Azèlie to congratulate her, forgetting, in the moment of his own triumph and honours, that she was no longer his sister. Her looks of sorrow and despair instantly recalled him to the painful consciousness that she was not included in his change of condition. She would have withdrawn herself from his manful and brotherly shelter, but he held her to his heart and whispered,

"Nay, sweet sister! I am still thy brother—still Renault to thee."

"I am thy slave, Renault!"

"Never! no, never!"

At this moment an individual, who had some time stood within hearing, wrapped in a cloak and wearing his hat low over his brows, stepped up, and, pressing Renault's hand, said, in a low tone of voice,

"I congratulate thee, my noble marquis! Thy place here is now better supplied by me," he added, receiving the hand of Azèlie from that of Renault.

"It is the opinion of this tribunal," now said Reggio, rising with dignity, "that Renault, lately called the Quadroon, is the rightful heir of the late Marquis of Caronde, and can, therefore, be no slave; but, on the other hand, is a free citizen and a noble-born gentleman."

At these words Estelle instinctively gave utterance to a cry of joy, and in the presence of the whole assembly rushed forward, half way met by Renault, and was clasped to his true and manly heart.

"S'death! This is a fair scene!" exclaimed the count, amid the general surprise. "Love hath been at hide and seek in my palace!"

"If my Lord of Osma," continued the judge, after a moment's pause, "presses the claim, Jules, lately known as the Marquis Caronde, may be clearly proven to be his slave, inasmuch as he now stands in the position the most noble Renault, marquis of Caronde, so lately occupied. Is it your pleasure to urge this point, my lord?"

Before Osma could give the reply that rose to his lips, the disgraced Jules, who for the last few moments had been fixing his eyes upon his kneeling and wretchedly guilty mother, with an expression in which was concentrated all his fierce wrath against her, suddenly leaped forward like a wild beast, and with his left hand seized her by the throat. His clutch was like that of the tiger fixed in the flesh of its victim. She became instantly livid in the face, and her eyes were forced out. The first joints of his fingers were hid by the depth and strength of his pressure. Osma caught his wrist, but the hand was immovèable, and his hold upon the throat deadly as his vindictive energy.

"By Heaven! loose thy clutch, madman," cried the count, "or I will sever thy hand like its fellow with a blow of my sword."

The only reply he received was a demoniacal and glaring stare, that convinced him madness had taken the seat of reason. He forbore the blow, and with the assistance of Renault and the *alguazil mayor*, finally succeeded in tearing him from his mother.

She was already dead! He had broken her neck.

By the command of Osma, he was instantly dragged forth from the hall to a place of confinement, while the body of the unfortunate and guilty woman was removed. It was followed by the tearful eyes both of

Azèlie and Renault ; for to the one she was still a mother, and to the other she had ever been as one.

The sorceress, to whom the appearance of the vicar-general, thus controlling the subsequent progress of events, was an incident unlooked for, now approached Don Henrique, and said warmly,

"Did I not bid thee keep within the crowd ? Leave the maiden to me. Osma's eye is already arrested by thy guise !"

The young man obeyed ; and, when the count approached to demand who he was, was already lost in the throng, while the sorceress remained by Azèlie, sustaining her with one arm about her waist. Ere the count spoke to the maiden, as it appeared to be his intention to do, he suddenly addressed the Father Dagobert, who was standing near by, now a spectator only.

"Hast thou, my lord vicar," asked he, sarcastically, "any confessions touching this gentle quadroone, that I may not take her to mine own palace as my slave ?"

"None, my lord, save those I fear thou wilt with sorrow make in thy death-hour, if thou doest the wrong thou contemplatest in this matter," answered the vicar-general, with fearless reproof.

"I am my own conscience-keeper, priest," retorted the count, with haughty displeasure, turning from him towards Azèlie. "Fiend !" he said, as his eye fell on the shielding form of the sorceress, "thou art ever crossing my path like an evil omen. Transfer the maiden to me, and stand aside !"

"Touch her not, Garcia Ramirez !"

"I will have thee seized."

"I laugh at thy power."

"Resign thy charge !"

"Wouldst thou receive her as thy slave or thy mistress, noble governor ?" she scornfully demanded, without moving.

"Is she not my slave now ?"

"Ay, *more* to thee than thy slave, Garcia of Os-

ma," she replied, while the deepest meaning seemed to speak out at her eyes, as they rested upon his face.

"What is thy meaning, woman," he demanded, with the quick suspicion of some covert design.

"Thou shalt soon learn!"

She then waved her hand commandingly towards the tribunal, to the immediate actors in the scene before it, and to the whole assembly. Having by this act drawn the attention of every eye in the vast hall, she drew herself to her utmost height, and rested her gaze full upon the face of the Count of Osma, with something of the expression with which the inquisitor watches the countenance of his victim while he is inflicting the torture.

"My Lord of Osma! listen to the story of a Spanish knight I have to tell thee. 'Tis eighteen years ago that a youthful noble of Castile was taken prisoner by the Moors and carried captive to Morocco. The emperor compelled him to labour in the gardens of his palace; and his occupation was to draw water from the marble fountains to wet the plants that grew around the latticed windows of the harem. The emperor had an only daughter. I see thou art listening to me, governor!"

"Go on," said Osma, with interest.

"She was fair as the lily when the snow-cloud lingers between it and the sun; as gentle as the dove; as beautiful in limb as the antelope; and as fleet as the mountain roe. Her voice was the rival of the nightingale; and her spirits were gay and happy as the heart of the morning lark when he mounts upward, singing, as he goes, to welcome the sun. Her hair was jetty as night; and from the shadow of the curls that floated above her brow, her eyes shone out like twin-stars, inviting to a heaven of love. Dost thou listen, Count of Osma?"

"I do; I pray thee go on!"

"From her lattice she saw the youthful knight, and he found favour in her eyes for his beauty and misfortunes. From day to day she gazed on him unseen,

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till love at length stole away her heart. She sought him in the garden and told her love. Evening after evening they met in the olive-bower of Asmil; and to the falling of distant fountains, the music of the nightingale, and the sighing of zephyrs laden with perfumes, they loved, and discoursed of love, even until the tints of the morning tinged the rosy orient. At length the young princess secretly became the bride of the young Castilian knight, none save the priest of Mohammed and her faithful slave being present. She now proposed his escape, and to fly with him. The hour came for the midnight flight, and *he betrayed her!* The mourning Zillah was left desolate! The husband of her hand and heart, the idol of her soul, had proved false and unworthy the pearl of her princely love! Dost thou listen, count?"

He silently waved his hand for her to proceed, as if he dared not trust himself to speak, while the most absorbing and anxious interest was apparent in every feature.

"From that hour she drooped. Her faithful slave at length proposed that she should seek him in his own lordly halls, accuse him of his perfidy, avenge her wrongs by his presence, and then die at his feet.

"They reached, at length, the shores of Castile, and came one stormy night to the castle of her treacherous lord. It beetled over the sea, was crowned with majestic towers, and encompassed by high and stately walls. From every window and casement blazed a light. It was a festal night, and on St. Michael's eve! They landed weary, yet full of hope, and entered the wide gates of the castle with a crowd of guests. They moved on, and came to a vast hall hung with banners and armour. Knights and nobles, dames and maidens, were gathered there, and every eye was fixed with interest upon a group standing before an altar. She saw that it was a bridal group. The priest was reading aloud the service, and the bridegroom and bride were standing before him, with hand clasped in hand. In the former Zillah beheld him she sought. Rushing

forward, she shrieked, 'my husband !' and fell at his feet senseless. The ceremony ceased ; but the bridegroom, instantly recognising in the princess his wife, sternly commanded his servants to bear off the mad woman, and cast her forth into the storm, and then he calmly bade the rite proceed. Dost thou hear the tale, my lord ?" she asked, fixing upon him her full, dark gaze.

He was silent ; but, with compressed lips and glassy eyeballs, kept his eyes upon her, as if they were fixed by a spell.

" Her faithful slave," continued the sorceress, " bore her from the outer gate, where the menials had cast her, to a hut on the forest's edge. There, before morning, she gave birth to an infant daughter, and left it her own spirit. The poor peasants dug a grave for her, and she was buried the next night, alone and unwept, save by her devoted slave, who then took the child to the castle of its father, that he might take pity on it ; for she feared the innocent would perish in her arms. As she approached the gate, he came forth with horse, and hound, and horn. With the child in her arms, she stood in his path. He recognised the slave, and she told him the fate of his wife, and implored him to cherish her child. The sight of the infant inflamed him with rage and shame as he rode in the midst of his friends, and, with a curse upon them both, he set his hounds upon her to hunt her down. She escaped from them barely with her life to a lonely hamlet. There an assassin sent by him found her ; but by her arts and power she escaped, and bound his soul to fear ; and he spared the child. There long she hid herself, and became as a mother to this hapless daughter of a Moorish princess, and heiress of a noble Castilian name. I see thou dost listen to my tale, Sir Count !

" When the babe was two years old, she took the long-maturing resolution to avenge its mother's death, even with the life of its cruel father. She sought him in his castle, but learned he was on a foreign battle-field.

She followed him from land to land, and from sea to sea, and at length took ship for Cuba, whither she heard he had sailed. But she was taken captive by a pirate ere she reached the island, brought to this port, and exposed openly for sale in the market-place. Fearing lest the child should be taken from her, she called it her own. At length, the mistress of the governor, Ninine the Quadroone, became her purchaser ; and by-and-by, struck with the child's beauty, attempted the life of the supposed mother, that she might make it her own, contemplating the wealth and consideration her charms would bring her when she should grow into the bloom of girlhood. Her victim, however, escaped the death designed for her, and, feeling secure of the child's safety for the present, returned to her own country to gather wealth for this beloved daughter of her deceased mistress. But slavery and disaster detained her from the beloved child until a few days before thy arrival hither, Count of Osma, when she found all her watchful care was necessary to save her from wicked persecutors, whom her unfolding beauties had made enemies to her peace and honour. I have now done. Does the tale interest thee ? Does it please thine ear ?"

Osma continued for a moment gazing upon her after she had ceased speaking ; while the Moor Sulem, no less interested in her tale, showed by his countenance he had found the key to her mystery. The count, then starting, as if from a fearful dream, caught her by both wrists, and cried, with an impetuosity that was fearful, while his eyes, averted from her, were fixed upon the beautiful, pale, wondering face of Azèlie,

"Tell me, fearful woman ! Is this my child—is she my daughter ? Speak !"

"Behold her mother's picture !" she answered, taking from Azèlie the locket she had before given to her, and exhibiting to him the likeness of a lovely Moorish princess in the richest costume of her country.

He gazed upon it with a look of startling recogni-

tion, and then glanced from it to the face of the maiden. To every eye the resemblance was perfect.

"Didst thou not once give that miniature to Zillah, thy Moorish bride?" asked the sorceress, sternly, seeing that he evidently bore reluctant testimony in his heart to the truth of her tale.

"If it be the same, it has a miniature of myself within it."

"Give it me," cried the sorceress.

She touched a spring, and the locket opened, exposing within a likeness of a young cavalier, to which the Count of Osma still bore a striking resemblance.

He made no reply, but rapidly walked the space in front of the tribunal in troubled thought, while shame and disappointment, rather than remorse and paternal love, kindled his cheek. His troubled eye rested often on Estelle, pale and almost lifeless in the arms of Renault. To acknowledge Azélie as his daughter would be to repudiate Estelle. His love gave excuse for his undiminished passion for the Quadroone, and he came to a characteristic decision.

"Thy story is false, thou Moorish impostor! a stale invention, begotten by thy ambition to see thy offspring received among the noble. Ho, guards! Seize her! Bear her off, and answer for her forthcoming with your heads! *Algauzil mayor!* I commit this maiden to your custody! If thou valuest thy neck, see to her safety. This masquerade hath lasted full long. I will now play the governor and judge. Sit back with thy fellows, Signor Reggio. I will take my seat again, and, 'fore Heaven! my authority with it!"

"*Garcia!*" cried a deep voice, that made the count pause, as if chilled to marble, with one foot resting on the lower step of the forum to which he was in the act of ascending.

"*Garcia!*" again spoke the same voice, in tones of warning and reproof.

The count trembled.

"*GARCIA!*" a third time menacingly spoke Ihuahua, to whom all eyes were now turned.

"Who calls?" asked the count, with a deadly paleness on his cheeks and lips, while he seemed as if he would sink into the ground.

"Thy brother!" answered the venerable warrior; and, advancing near, he threw off his loose robes, and stood before him in the costume of an elderly Spanish cavalier.

"Does the sea give back its dead?" cried Osma, with fear.

"Dost thou remember me?"

"Thou art my elder brother, whom I believed dead!" he cried, with horror and despair.

"Thy *will* was surely my death, Garcia, but Heaven gave me escape by the very wickedness of the means thou didst employ to execute it. More gold than thou didst promise Rascas bought him from thee. He saved my life and secured my escape, returning to thee his own report of the execution of thy commands."

"'Tis false! I sought not thy death!"

"Behold the instrument of thy intended crime," cried the sorceress, directing the attention of all to Rascas, who leaned upon two men in front of the crowd. "He hath long since confessed all to me!"

"Ha! Rascas!" cried Osma, with delight, seeing him present. "Bear truly thy testimony!"

"Thou wilt little like it," answered Rascas, faintly, but ironically. "I obeyed thy commands all but the death, and by chance finding a dead fisherman on the beach, severed his head and carried it to thee for thy brother's, for which thou gavest me three hundred golden moldores—a rare price for a fisherman's head! It was on St. Michael's Day I brought thee the gory sight."

"Villain, thou hast destroyed thyself for this treachery," cried Osma, fiercely. "Am I bearded? Am I baited? Are both hell and heaven armed against me, that I am thus held at bay by ye all?"

"Garcia Ramirez," said Ihuahua, or rather Don Louis, count of Osma, as he had shown himself to be, "thou art bayed at by none save the bloodhounds of thine own guilty conscience! I am rejoiced to see

thee feel! Yet methinks a brother come to thee after twenty years' absence should receive a better welcome than that which sits upon thy dark and turbid brow! I am indeed thy elder brother Louis! whom, taking advantage of on a sick bed, thou didst imprison three years in the lowest dungeons of my own castle, with yonder assassin for my jailer; at whose hands, when at length thou wouldst have slain me, I received more mercy than at thine! From Spain I sailed for the New World, disgusted with the land that bore upon its green bosom a monster like thyself! With the feelings of an anchorite, I buried myself in the wilderness of America, but from circumstances was at length induced to throw off my solitary life and unite myself with its simple inhabitants. I married the daughter of the prince of the tribe to which I attached myself, and at his death became its chief. I had quite forgotten thee and thy crimes, when, three years ago, I heard of the attempted conquest, by the Spaniards, of this province, and heard also that Garcia, count of Osma, was their leader. From that moment I was filled with a desire to behold thee, resolved, if I found thee a reformed and penitent man, to leave thee to the possession of thy wickedly-gotten rank and title; but if the lapse of years had made thee gray in iniquity, to pluck thy honours from thy brow, and degrade thee to thy merited infamy and contempt."

The voice of Don Louis was elevated at the close to a stern and indignant tone. Garcia Ramarez listened to him while he was speaking with a set lip, bent brow, flashing eyes, a bright red spot on either cheek, and a nervous contraction of the fingers of his hands, that betrayed the fearful pitch of emotion to which he was inwardly moved. When he had ended, he drew in a long, hard breath, as if he would swallow down the feeling that swelled in his throat, and said through his teeth, in a low tone of the most ironical bitterness and scorn,

"And how has Louis Ramarez found his brother Garcia?"

"A chief devil in all but power," answered Don Louis, in a tone of horror and detestation.

"I will see whether I have power or not," cried Osma, bursting into a volcano of irresistible fury and vehemency, while his inflamed visage and burning eyes, with the passionate dilation and expansion of his whole form and figure, made him appear the living representative of the arch-fiend himself. Every eye that looked upon him, and witnessed the effect of his demoniacal phrensy, quailed with wondering dread. "If I am not the Count of Osma," continued he, "I am at least the governor of this province, and have the power to punish my enemies. Ho! Monterey! La Torre! my guards! Seize this Count of Osma and bind him! By the red rood! brother Louis, thou shalt find I have power here! and no man, save Don Alphonso, prince of Castile, from whom I received it, shall deprive me of it. Seize and load him with chains! How! Do ye hesitate?" he demanded, seeing the men-at-arms, after advancing a step, stop and look with surprise and alarm towards the windows that opened upon the corridor.

His own quick, fierce glance followed theirs, and he beheld with consternation, entering through every door-like casement, a file of Indian warriors, armed with spears and battle-axes, led by the young chief Opelousa, who, a short while before, had retired from the hall, and now reappeared dressed like a Spanish noble, save that the war-eagle's plume still towered above his head, in honour of the proud maternal blood that mingled with his no less noble Castilian current. In an instant of time, ere Osma could speak or move from the spot where this extraordinary event surprised him, the hall of judgment was filled with grim and painted warriors, who ranged themselves by the sides and in front of the tribunal, in stern and menacing silence, overawing the Spanish soldiery.

"Garcia," said Don Louis, with natural fraternal feeling, after surveying upon his features the effect of this sudden reverse of power, "I would forgive thee if I be-

lieved contrition could find a home in thy heart. But Heaven hath doomed thee to destruction, and sent upon thee madness, the incurable madness of habitual iniquity. Thy power here, as well as thy name and title, must now end! Iniquity and crime have prospered with thee during long years in their pursuit. But because thou hast been suffered to go on for a time unchecked, think not the vengeance of Heaven slumbers and will never waken! Wickedness is sometimes permitted to exist by infinite wisdom, that the sudden destruction of its author may not involve the innocent in his punishment. Thy lovely child has, in thine own case, been thy guardian angel, and till now arrested the suspended bolt from thy head! It hath at length fallen upon thee! but not until Heaven hath provided her another protector in the noble youth whose manly arm is sustaining her in this trying hour. It becomes a mortal like me to imitate Heaven. For her sake, I will give thee half of my estate if thou choosest to return to Spain. I will also withhold my attack upon thy forces here—for are they not all my countrymen?—if thou wilt now resign thy government.”

“To thee?” demanded Osma, degraded yet still haughty.

“It is already mine! One thousand warriors, such as you see here, whose will is my will, and who need but the sign of a lifted finger to fall upon thy soldiery, are within thy city’s walls! Five hundred Louisianians also have possession of its gates and barriers!”

“Were the leaves of thy forests warriors, and these to a man within the town, and filling my palace and council-chamber, I would not give up my power without a struggle. It shall never be said Garcia of Osma, or Garcia Ramarez, if thou wilt have it so, brother, ever gave up a fortress without striking a blow for its deliverance. I have lived a warrior, and I will die with a weapon in my hand! Naught but death or the command of my prince shall divest me of my authority!”

“Then resign it with what grace thou hast remain-

ing, tyrant, for thou wilt soon be divested of it," cried the gallant Montejo, entering the hall, bearing aloft a silken banner of the house of Castile, and approaching the tribunal. Behind him followed a pursuivant, in the gorgeous apparel and armour of his rank and office.

"Montejo ! Traitor !" shouted Osma, as he approached ; and then, seeing the pursuivant, he exclaimed with surprise, "How is this ? the king's herald, Olivier de Vezin ! What brought thee out of Spain ? To witness our disgrace ?"

"Know, Count of Osma—" interrupted Montejo.

"My name is Garcia Ramirez," said the governor, with irony.

"Know then, Garcia Ramirez," continued Montejo, with some surprise, "that, hearing of thy imprisonment of the prince Don Henrique, who voyaged with thee hither, his rank disguised to all save thyself and a few friends, I fled in the yacht which was to have borne him beyond the reach of thy vindictive power, to demand of the Governor of Cuba aid against thee. Ere I had got to sea, our ship fell in with a brigantine bound hither from Spain, having at Havanna taken on board his reverence the vicar-general. On board this vessel also came passenger the noble Olivier de Vezin, his Catholic majesty's royal herald at arms. He is present with me here, and will deliver his own message and proclamation."

Thus speaking, Montejo drew back a step for the royal herald to advance, when, recognising beneath his disguise Don Henrique standing beside Azèlie, who, with Renault and the sorceress, were deeply intent upon the development of events, he, with a cry of surprise and grateful joy, cast himself into his embrace.

The herald, commanding the attention of the assembly and tribunal, proclaimed, after the usual ceremonial preliminaries, "That Providence, in its wisdom, having removed Don Alphonso, prince of Castile and the Asturias, Infante of Spain, and heir to the throne of Spain and Castile, by death, without issue, it was the will of his Catholic majesty that his royal and beloved son,

the young prince, Don Carlos Henrique, of Aragon, now Prince of Castile, heir and successor to the throne, do speedily return to Spain from his voluntary banishment, incurred," continued the herald, "in dread of the church, to which royal wisdom would have consecrated him, lest by his marriage, the realm, in another generation, should be torn by civil dissensions between rival houses! But Heaven, in its inscrutable ways, having put an end to the elder branch of the royal line, the commands and statutes relating to the younger brother, Don Carlos Henrique, are revoked; and he is hereby, and henceforward ever will be, received and acknowledged as Prince of Castile, and heir to the throne of Spain and the Indies. God and Spain! *Viva* the royal Prince of Castile!"

Garcia Ramarez heard this proclamation with an expression on his countenance that was indescribable. There was a smile just perceptible on his mouth, and a triumphant expansion of the pupil of the eye as he looked up and moved it round upon each face separately. Don Henrique watched him, and, together with Renault and the sorceress, understood what was passing in his heart. His glance finally settled on Montejo.

"Didst thou not say but now, traitorous Montejo, that it were a grace to resign my power, lest it should be taken from me?" he asked, with malignant triumph.

"I did."

"This proclamation of De Vezin, methinks, doth not revoke my commission. When this beardless Prince of Castile, whom Heaven would have on the throne to make of the realm a royal masquerade—when this new Infante shall bid me resign the power conferred on me by his brother Don Alphonso, then will I obey; but thou, traitor, shalt not live to see it. To arms, Spaniards! To arms! Sound the battle-cry," he shouted, suddenly waving his sword, and sending his loud voice far into the Place d'Armes. "Lancers! dragoons! and men-at-arms! Spain and honour calls on you to do battle for your conquests!"

"Hold, Spaniards!" shouted the voice of Don Hen-

rique, casting aside his disguise. "Behold in me Don Carlos, the Prince of Castile! I command your allegiance and obedience! Garcia of Ramarez! you may well stand appalled! I am no spirit, but a living man, whom Heaven hath raised up to be the instrument of its vengeance. Thy power is ended! Thou hast filled the measure of thy crimes, and justice and vengeance wait for their victim!"

"Gobin 'll have to be gov'nor again," said the fool, who had crept upon the forum unobserved, and now stood upon a chair of the tribunal.

"Thus do I mock ye all! Ha, ha, ha!" cried the count, through his set teeth; and with a devilish and most horrible laugh of mingled derision and despair, he threw himself forward upon his sword point, and fell pierced through the body upon the floor of the council-chamber.

A few words will close the tale.

The love and virtue of Azèlie were rewarded by the hand of the prince, to whom, as granddaughter to the Moorish emperor, she was nearly equal in rank. When afterward, as reigning princess of Castile, she presided over the court of her capital, she was distinguished not less for her beauty than for her virtues, with which she won the hearts of all around her; and while she lived, Don Henrique never regretted that he had bestowed his hand and princely coronet where he had given his heart. But she lived not to reach the throne; and when, at length, Don Henrique, under the designation of Carlos IV., seated himself upon it, another and less lovely sat by his side.

Renault also, after the mourning for her father was over, became united to Estelle. The gentle and melancholy beauty of the Marchioness of Caronde, as well as the noble bearing of the young marquis, were not forgotten in Paris, even in the early part of the present generation, by the surviving courtiers of the time of Louis XIV.

Don Louis, the Count of Osma, having no reason to dispossess Spain of the province of Louisiana by at-

tacking her troops, returned with his warriors to the forests, to which habit and disgust of the world had attached him, and died in old age, wept and honoured by his adopted tribe ; while his son, whom he had educated with the object of one day inheriting the home and titles of his ancestors, sailed for Spain with Don Henrique, where the castle of Osma received him as its rightful heir and master. Don Henrique took the Moor with him, and thence sent him to Morocco.

The sorceress, whom her skill in Moorish astrology, as well as the knowledge which circumstances, improved by her own sagacity and subtlety, had enabled to play such a mysterious and extraordinary part in the foregoing scenes, and hold such an influence over the minds, not only of the vicious, but the virtuous, became the faithful and devoted slave of Azélie, as she had been of Zillah, where, at length, she died in Castile. The grieved princess, her mistress, erected a tablet beside a mausoleum, which her filial piety had built above her mother's obscure grave, and long afterward mourned her death. Rascas recovered from his wounds through the healing balm administered to him by the sorceress, and ended his life on the gallows.

Gobin was taken to France under the especial protection of Renault, and being by him presented at court, without the aid of his friend Boviedo, was long known at Versailles as the rarest jester and wittiest fool of his time. Boviedo expired suddenly on horseback, not long after the death of his master, while in the act of blowing his trumpet in honour of the arrival of a new governor ; thus dying, as it were, in harness, as became a doughty Aragonese trumpeter.

Reggio and his council were left in charge of the affairs of the province until Don Henrique sent out another governor. Those whom Osma had imprisoned were liberated. The remaining five of the Seven Frères became faithful supporters of the Spanish government, Charleval himself being made by Don Henrique colonel of a regiment of creoles, which he formed from the

chasseurs and *courreurs du bois*, and was also created a perpetual *regidor* of the superior council.

" Thus end I this BOKE ; for as much as in wrytyng of the same my penne is worn, myn hande very, and myn eyne dimmed with overmoche looking on the whit paper."

THE END.

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